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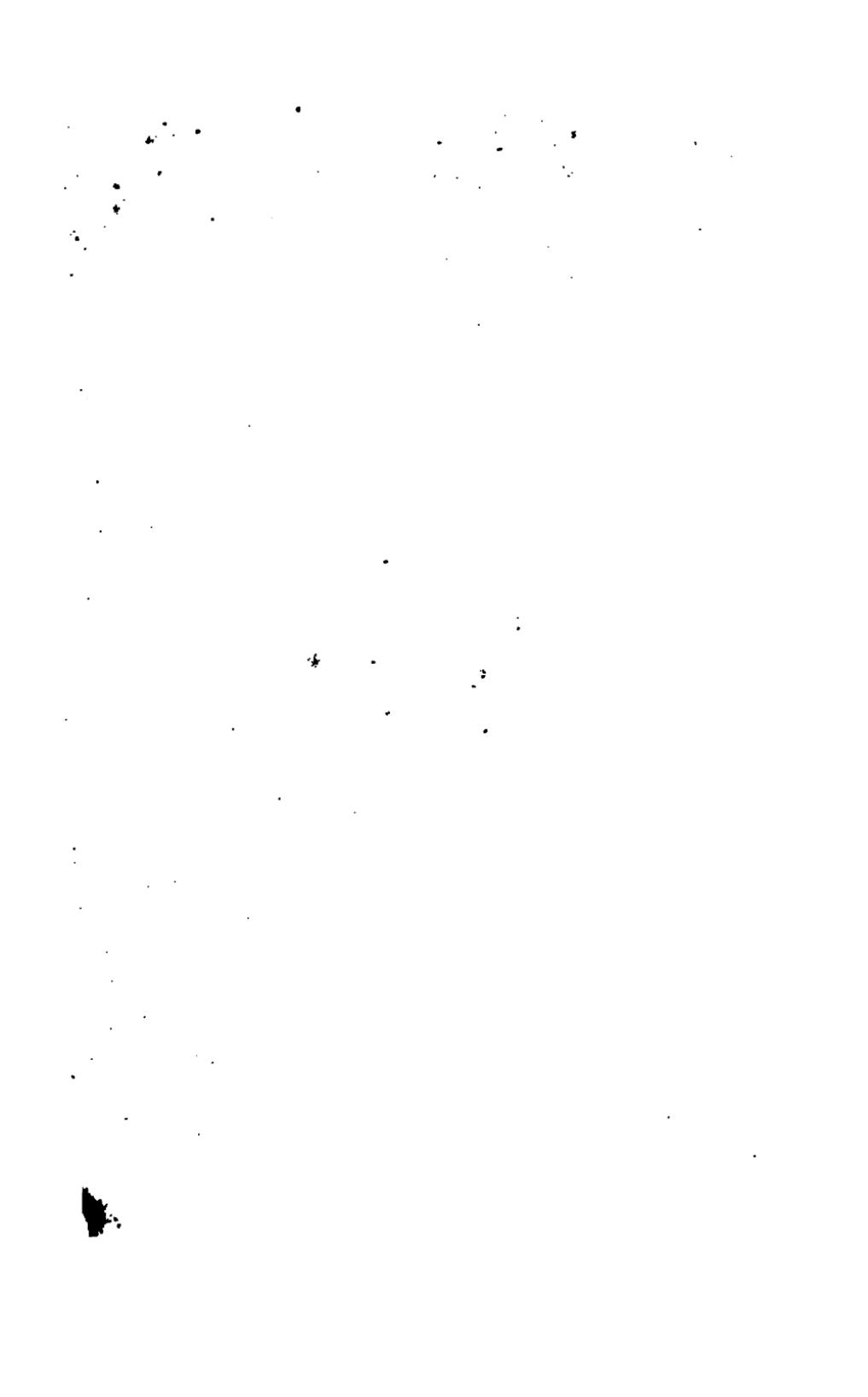
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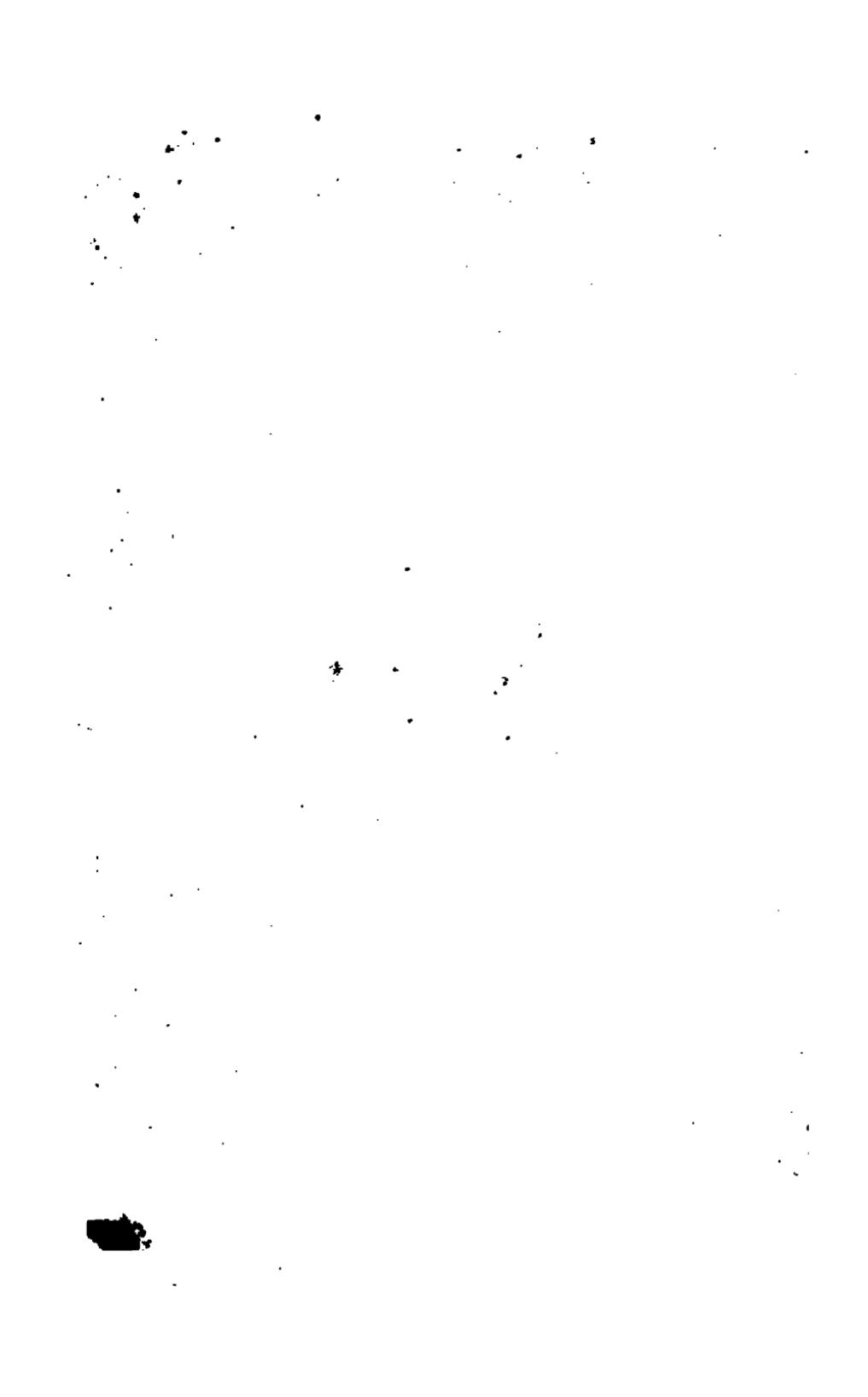
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MEMORIES OF P A T M O S;

OR,

SOME OF THE GREAT WORDS AND VISIONS OF
THE APOCALYPSE.

BY

J. R. MACDUFF, D.D.



"MARAN'ATHA," ("Our Lord is coming.")—1 COR. xvi. 22.

"To seek to ascend by one's own might is the part of Lucifer: but when one has the call, as St John had here, 'Come up hither,' then it is right to proceed. O God! may our minds be filled with such holy admiration, that we shall indeed withdraw ourselves from what is earthly and holds us in bondage, and direct our thoughts heavenwards to apprehend that which Thou showdest to Thy servant, so that we may truly be improved and edified by it. Amen!"—BENGEL.

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P R E F A C E.

FOR many years has the writer desired to approach, and as often has he been deterred from approaching, this mysterious portion of the Word of God ;—the *Adytum*—“ the Holy of Holies ” of Sacred writ.

Nor does he feel, that standing thus long in the outer vestibule has in any wise better qualified or emboldened him, at the present hour, to withdraw the veil. If he ventures now to enter, it is not with daring or presumptuous footstep. It is not, assuredly, with the design of becoming a volunteer in the ranks of prognosticators and soothsayers,—still less of claiming the ultimate solution and fulfilment of any part of the ambiguous symbolism of the Book, in those tragic events, which, while the present pages are passing through the press, have been convulsing the nations. By no bold divining of “ the secret

things" which belong only to God, would he seek to pander to the credulous and the curious—"rushing in where angels fear to tread." He undertakes to expound or defend formally and systematically no one of the varied prophetic theories, be they "historical," "preterist," or "futurist," which divide apocalyptic expositors. But independent of all such,—independent even of any consecutive treatment of the Book itself,—there are to be found within it manifold isolated passages of transcendent grandeur, beauty, and comfort, which may with special edification be selected as themes for sacred meditation,—radiant stars in its firmament, which can be seen by the naked eye of faith, without the aid of the prophetic lens or telescope,—priceless gems, not in its deep mines, but lying on the surface, to which the visions which surround them may be used only as a setting: thus preserving a certain unity and continuity of treatment, without involving committal to any peculiar scheme of interpretation. It has been well said by a devout and thoughtful master in Israel—"In order to derive much benefit from the Book of Revelation, it is not necessary to have an under-

standing of its prophetic signification. We shall not have missed the blessing, if, in the course of our perusal of it, we have caught glimpses, it may be dim and mysterious glimpses, of heavenly blessedness hereafter to be realised, and of that Divine Person, who opened the gates of Heaven to all believers,—glimpses such as stir in us more fervent aspirations after spiritual good, and urge us forward on our pilgrimage with better hope and heartier energy. Even as the wayworn traveller catches, through tangled branches, the pinnacles and spires of the city to which he is bound, and, cheered by the momentary and disjointed vision, presses on towards it with elastic step and buoyant heart."

The pages, accordingly, which follow, purport to be "Memories,"—no more; leading strains in the magnificent melody, omitting many subordinate ones. Moreover, this selection from 'some of the great words and visions' is taken mainly from the opening and closing chapters. To have attempted the treatment of the entire Book would have not only demanded too wide a canvas, but would have necessitated also adhesion to one or other of those

conflicting prophetical schools and systems to which allusion has just been made.*

A few preliminary words may not be out of place here, regarding the general plan and structure of the Apocalypse. It may be described as a record of the struggles and victories of the Church, viewed in connection with God's dealings with the nations. It consists of two parts or volumes. The *First* contains a prologue or introduction ; with the seven epistles to the seven Churches of Asia. The *Second* may be described as a prophetic drama in three acts or sections ; comprehending the vision of the Seals, Trumpets, and Vials. This second volume, which

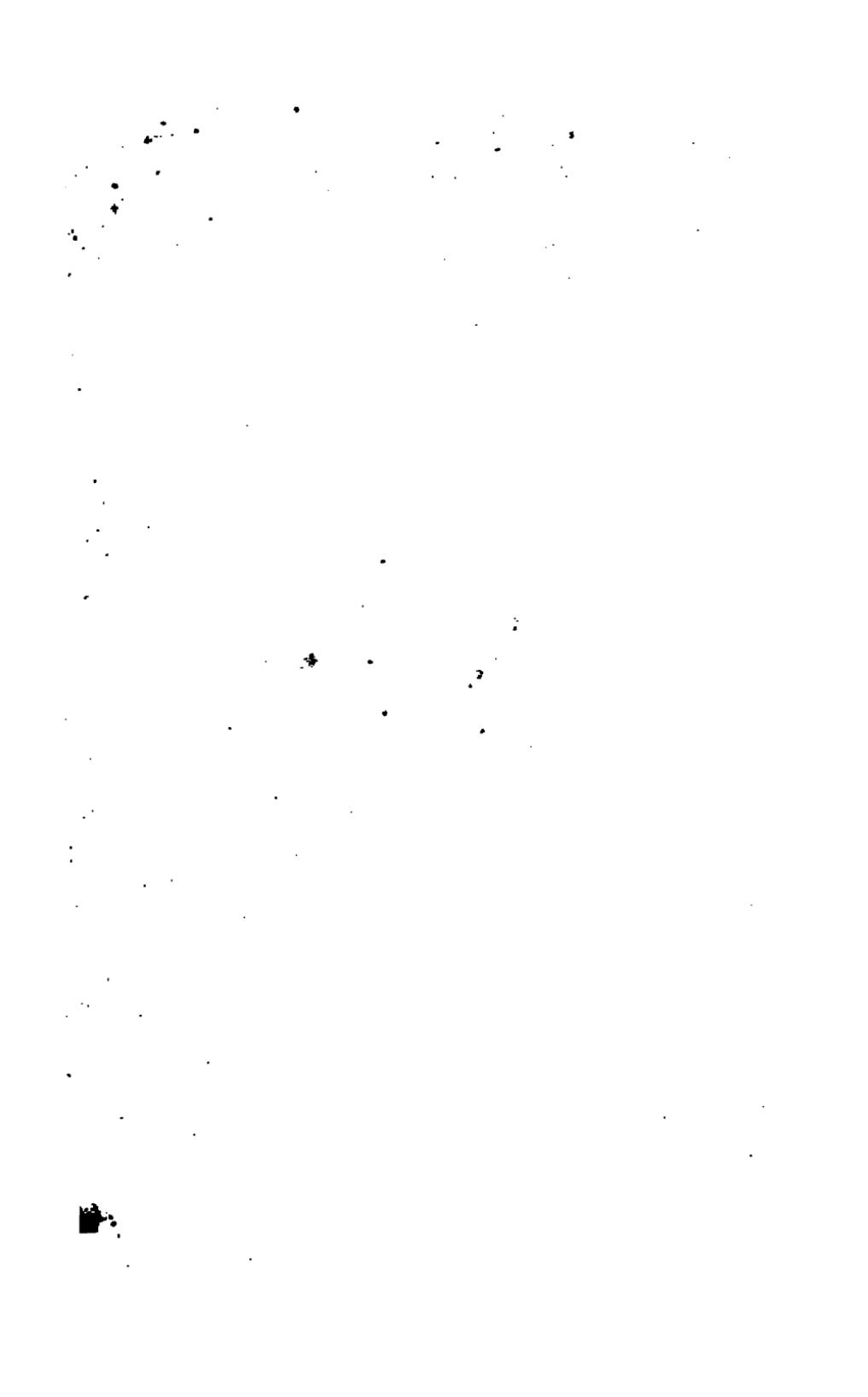
* While this has been my aim, it has been impossible, in the elucidation of several passages, to avoid the expression of opinion as to the adoption or rejection of portions at least, of these theories of interpretation. It will be observed I have rejected the purely and continuously historical one. I am unable, as many able expositors have done, to regard the Book as a consecutive prophetical history. I am inclined rather to adopt the view which is given by Dr Arnold, in his "Sermons on the Interpretation of Prophecy," and which is thus epitomised by a recent writer : "That we should bear in mind, that predictions have a lower historical sense, as well as a higher spiritual sense ; that there may be one, or more than one, typical, imperfect, historical fulfilment of a prophecy, in each of which the higher spiritual fulfilment is shadowed forth more or less distinctly." "The recognition of this principle," the same writer adds, "would pave the way for the acceptance, in a modified sense, of many of the interpretations of the historical school, and would not exclude the most valuable portions of the other schemes."— Article, "Revelation of St John," Smith's Bible Dictionary.

may be called the Revelation proper, begins also with a sublime prologue, and ends with an equally sublime and solemn epilogue or conclusion.*

Of the events recorded in this Great prophecy, there is one, ever and anon recurring, of pre-eminent and peerless grandeur—THE SECOND COMING *of the Lord Jesus Christ*. Indeed, the Apocalypse may emphatically be named “The Book of THE COMING ONE,” Its key-note or weighty watchword, as given in the title page, is, “MARANATHA” (“*The Lord is coming*”). This forms the culminating point of each separate portion of the sacred drama—seals, trumpets, vials. The curtain (if with reverence it may be so expressed) falls, at the end of each act, with the announcement in the ear of the waiting Church, of ‘the Blessed hope.’ To use another simile, as it is the opening, so is it the magnificent closing chime of all, “Behold HE COMETH with clouds ;”—“Surely I COME quickly.”

“ Faith’s ear, with awful still delight,
Counts them like minute bells at night,
Keeping the heart awake till dawn of morn,
While to her funeral pile this aged world is borne.”

* To the Table of contents, an alternative threefold plan or division of the Book is appended ; but one quite in harmony with that above stated.







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“WRITE THE THINGS WHICH THOU HAST SEEN, AND THE THINGS WHICH ARE,
AND THE THINGS WHICH SHALL BE HEREAFTER.”—REV. i. 19.

PART I.

“THE THINGS SEEN ;” or, The Opening Vision, with Christ’s Charges to
the Seven Churches.—CHAPTERS I., II., III.

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“THE THINGS WHICH ARE ;” or, Christ with His Church Universal on
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“THE THINGS WHICH SHALL BE HEREAFTER ;” or, Christ in Heaven ruling
His Church Militant and Triumphant.—CHAPTERS XI., XII., XIII., XIV.,
XV., XVI., XVII., XVIII., XIX., XX., XXI., XXII.

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A

I.

The Scene and Spectator.

“THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST, WHICH GOD GAVE UNTO HIM, TO SHOW UNTO HIS SERVANTS THINGS WHICH MUST SHORTLY COME TO PASS; AND HE SENT AND SIGNIFIED IT BY HIS ANGEL UNTO HIS SERVANT JOHN: WHO BARE RECORD OF THE WORD OF GOD, AND OF THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS CHRIST, AND OF ALL THINGS THAT HE SAW. BLESSED IS HE THAT READETH, AND THEY THAT HEAR THE WORDS OF THIS PROPHECY, AND KEEP THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE WRITTEN THEREIN: FOR THE TIME IS AT HAND. JOHN TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES WHICH ARE IN ASIA: GRACE BE UNTO YOU, AND PEACE, FROM HIM WHICH IS, AND WHICH WAS, AND WHICH IS TO COME; AND FROM THE SEVEN SPIRITS WHICH ARE BEFORE HIS THRONE; AND FROM JESUS CHRIST, WHO IS THE FAITHFUL WITNESS, AND THE FIRST-BEGOTTEN OF THE DEAD, AND THE PRINCE OF THE KINGS OF THE EARTH. UNTO HIM THAT LOVED US, AND WASHED US FROM OUR SINS IN HIS OWN BLOOD, AND HATH MADE US KINGS AND PRIESTS UNTO GOD AND HIS FATHER; TO HIM BE GLORY AND DOMINION FOR EVER AND EVER; AMEN. BEHOLD, HE COMETH WITH CLOUDS; AND EVERY EYE SHALL SEE HIM, AND THEY ALSO WHICH PIERCED HIM: AND ALL KINDREDS OF THE EARTH SHALL WAIL BECAUSE OF HIM. EVEN SO, AMEN. I AM ALPHA AND OMEGA, THE BEGINNING AND THE ENDING, SAITH THE LORD, WHICH IS, AND WHICH WAS, AND WHICH IS TO COME, THE ALMIGHTY. I JOHN, WHO ALSO AM YOUR BROTHER, AND COMPANION IN TRIBULATION, AND IN THE KINGDOM AND PATIENCE OF JESUS CHRIST, WAS IN THE ISLE THAT IS CALLED PATMOS, FOR THE WORD OF GOD, AND FOR THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS CHRIST. I WAS IN THE SPIRIT ON THE LORD'S DAY.”—REV. I. 1-10.

THE SCENE AND SPECTATOR.

THAT evening in April can never be forgotten, when sailing through the Archipelago on the way from Palestine to Smyrna, and just as the sun was sinking in subdued splendour over its western rocky ridges, our eyes rested on THE ISLE OF PATMOS.

Though privileged to enjoy, a few weeks before, the most hallowed associations of all connected with the Apostle of Love, while treading the streets of Jerusalem and the shores of the Lake of Galilee, we had expected to renew these in another form, as we were afterwards permitted to do, amid the desolate ruins of Ephesus, where his own saintly life mellowed by venerable age was closed, and where his Gospel in all probability was written. But sudden and unexpected was this new souvenir of the Gospel era, seeming to rise on the bosom of the deep like one of his own visions. The trail of golden light, brighter had it been seen half an hour before on the molten waters, was yet sufficient irresistibly to recall the description of "the Sea of Glass mingled with fire." The Island itself was un conspicuous as one of our own Hebrides, but it took its place thenceforward in the shrine of memory, among the world's holiest sanctuaries. Some may remember their impressions when for the first time they came in view, on

the waves of the Atlantic, of Iona, the birthplace and cradle of the faith of Northern Britain, the lonely home of a true successor of the Apostles. Others may remember their sensations in standing on the bridge which occupies the site of the old dungeon at Bedford, and gazing on the place where the world's great Dreamer dreamt his dream. But what are these compared to the emotions awakened at beholding the exile home of the Beloved Disciple—the very spot where, before the eye of the rapt seer, there passed the dream of all dreams—“the visions of God ;”—where the portals of heaven seemed as if they had descended and the gates of pearl had been flung open, while he heard unspeakable things which it is not possible for a man to utter !

More than half a century had elapsed since John had pillow'd his head on his Lord's bosom at the Last Supper, gazed in tearful agony by the cross, and wistfully followed Him with the other bereaved men of Galilee gathered on the Mount of Ascension, until the cloud received Him out of their sight. He alone of all the Apostolic company still survived,—the only living bond connecting the Church of his day with the ministry of the Great Master ; and, like the last plank of a dismembered vessel, he was now driven by a storm of persecution to this solitary rock in the Ægean Sea.*

* According to Suetonius, it was a common custom at this period, among the Romans, to transport prisoners to desolate islands (*in asperritimas insularum*). PATMOS, at the time of John's banishment, was doubtless more uncultivated than it is now,—probably little more than a barren

We have no account whatever of the immediate cause of his banishment from his adopted home in the great capital of Proconsular Asia. We can only surmise

rock, whose ruggedness rendered it all the more suitable for the purposes of a state prison. Indeed, as has been noted, its insignificance, seclusion, and obscurity are best attested by the fact, that previous to its connection with the Apostle, it is only three times referred to in the whole course of classical literature. From the distant view I obtained—and which is attempted to be rendered in the frontispiece—its rocky summits are not without picturesqueness in outline, and of considerable elevation. “It is remarkable,” says the most observant of travellers who have illustrated the scenes of sacred story, and who had himself the opportunity leisurely to visit the island, “from the complexity of its shape and outline; in this respect bearing a singular resemblance to Ithaca, and presenting a striking example of that indentation and variety of coast which have been often remarked as characteristic of European, and above all of Grecian geography. Small as it is, Patmos is broken asunder into two separate insulated peaks, united only by a narrow isthmus; and whilst the rocky hills are broken into innumerable crags, the shore is indented with innumerable bays.” (STANLEY.) Pliny mentions the island as being thirty miles in circumference, although by others this extent is considerably curtailed. According to Van de Velde, who is generally to be depended on for accuracy, “it is twelve English miles in length, six in breadth, and twenty-eight in circumference” (vol. i., p. 41). Its principal town is perched on one of these summits just referred to, and is famous for its monastery, with a library rich in ancient MSS. The legend lingers, that Helena, the mother of Constantine, added this building to the other sacred edifices identified with her name in Bible lands—that on her way to Jerusalem she landed at Patmos, and intrusted St Christodoulos with a large sum of money to erect a suitable memorial on the spot which had been honoured to receive the last inspired utterances. Her wishes were faithfully fulfilled. The adjoining island of Naxos furnished the marble which built alike the monastery and a church on the site of the cave—“The Repose,” (Καρδπαύρις)—where John is said to have written or received the Revelations. To this church, which is situated half way between the town and the harbour of La Scala, was given the name of Apokalypsa. In its inner chapel there is a picture representing the vision of the Angels of the Seven Churches and the Apostle asleep beneath. A school or academy adjoining, maintained for long a great reputation in the Eastern Church as a seat of

it to have been the faithful, unflinching proclamation of the divine Person and glory of his Lord—the reiterated sermon on the great opening and closing texts of his Gospel : “ The Word was with God, and the Word was God ”—“ These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ” (John i. 1; xx. 31). It would almost seem indicated indeed, in this introduction to the Apocalypse, that that cardinal article in his former writings was the same for which he was still content to suffer : “ Who *bare* record of the Word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ ” (ver. 2). It was the “ new power ” on the earth—‘ the power of God unto salvation ’—which had come into antagonism with the power which, enthroned on the seven hills, would brook no rival even in name. It was the “ another King, one Jesus,” which had roused the susceptibilities—kindled the jealous fury—of the minions of Cæsar throughout every province of the vast empire—Ephesus not excepted.

Be this as it may ; from being the loved Apostle, the most honoured of men, he was now an exile and cast-

learning, although latterly it has declined. The writer to whom I am indebted for this information, and who has also personally visited the spot, mentions an additional fact which renders Patmos unique in its ecclesiastical arrangements—viz., that, besides these two larger buildings, there are 364 small churches or chapels scattered throughout the island, corresponding to the number of days in the year, and that service is performed in these by rotation. The Greek sailors seem to hold the place in sacred reverence—guns are fired as they pass under its steeps, and these are replied to by the bell of the monastery.—See an interesting paper in *Sunday at Home*, 1863 ; also article “ *Patmos* ” in Smith’s Bible Dic., and Dean Stanley’s “ Sermons during his Tour in the East.”

away on this inhospitable shore; his hoary locks appealing in vain to Roman clemency for exemption from galling servitude and drudgery in the mines of Patmos. But where cannot God find His people and His people find their God? He who to the lonely Jacob converted the dreary waste and the rudest of pillows into the gate of heaven, could make the wilds of an island-prison bright with His glory—resplendent with His presence. He seems, indeed, in every age of the Church, to have vouchsafed special attestations and assurances of His grace and love to His more favoured servants, when called either to the endurance of trial or tempted to lapse into despondency. When the heart of Moses was ready to faint under Israel's repeated murmurings, God set him in the cleft of a rock and made all His glory to pass before him (Exod. xxxiii. 22). When Elijah, the most heroic of the Old Testament worthies, waxed weak as other men,—when, in a moment of strange infirmity, leaving work and duty, he could see apparently nothing but unhallowed altars blazing throughout the land—ten thousand knees bowing to Baal and kissing his impious shrine,—God made all the elements of nature preach to him of the power he had disowned, and followed these by the 'still, small voice'; thus, by manifestations alike of omnipotence and love, rebuking his distrust and reviving his faith (1 Kings xix. 11, 12). When Paul, in a later age, had the thorn in the flesh sent to buffet him—the time and occasion of his trial was made that of richer communications of divine grace. He was led most gladly, there-

fore, to glory in his infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon him (2 Cor. xii. 9). So it was with John. That aged sufferer, whose ninety years had furrowed his cheek with wrinkles, was now drinking the foretold cup and being baptized with the foretold baptism of his suffering Master and Lord. Exiled, forlorn, unbefriended by man, he was about to hold mystic communings with his Saviour, shared by no mortal before or since. It was to be in the Isle of Patmos as he had before personally experienced on the Mount of Transfiguration: when the heavenly Visitants had vanished, his best Friend was still left, to extract loneliness from his solitude and sorrow from his heart. He "saw no man save Jesus only." These storms of persecution might rage as they might around his unsheltered head; but he was about to know, as few have done before or since, the truth of those grand prophetic words, "A **MAN**" (the Brother man he had loved on earth—the glorified Man now exalted on the Throne)—"a **MAN** shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, . . . as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

The first five opening words indicate the design of the whole Book—"The *Revelation of Jesus Christ*." For while in their primary meaning it is a Revelation made to Christ by God the Father of things future; still, in no remote or accommodated sense is He the Revealed as well as the Revealer. As it was the adorable Redeemer in His Divine and human nature—the God-man whom John in his Gospel had delighted to honour;—so

now in his *Apocalypse*, the *Gospel* of his old age, it is still the same Great figure which fills the inspired canvas; not the *Revelation* of dogmas and doctrines, but of the glorified Person of his Living Lord—exhibiting Him as superintending all events in the future of His Church and the world—overruling all their conflicts for His own glory and the ultimate triumph of His cause and kingdom. The Book in the truest sense is the *Epiphany* of Christ;—the glorious Being in the midst of the golden candlesticks—the slain Lamb standing before the throne—the Lion of the tribe of Judah—the Conqueror on the white horse—the enthroned Judge. All the other parts and drapery of the visions, gorgeous as they are, are subordinate and subsidiary to this. The earthly cry is, “Come, Lord Jesus!” The heavenly cry is, “Worthy is the Lamb!” Christ is thus ‘all in all’ to the Church on earth and to the Church of the glorified. The evolution of successive events in history and providence is represented as being in His hand as the Church’s Great Head and Ruler. Over that grand diorama of earth and its kingdoms—as picture after picture in magnificent unfolding passes before us—the sublime ascription seems to reverberate in undying echoes, “Alleluia! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!”

The prologue, which occupies the first three verses, is followed by John’s own salutation or dedication. Affectionately simple is the introduction of his own name in contrast with the doxology with which it is conjoined. “*John*, to the Seven Churches which are in

Asia." "John"—no enumeration of his antecedents—no arrogating of title or assumption of Apostolic dignity or prerogative—no assertion of his near and privileged intercourse with his beloved Lord. And again, when he repeats the name in verse 9, it is only with the touchingly simple addition of "John, brother and companion in tribulation." Strong corroborative testimony, were that required, that he and no other was the author of the Book. He speaks as one needing no additional or special designation, further than being the bearer of the honoured name known widely and well throughout infant Christendom.

He utters the opening benediction of "Grace and peace" from the thrice Holy Trinity (ver. 4). The FATHER is described as "Him which is, and which was, and which is to come;" the Great I AM in the eternity of His unchanging nature. The HOLY GHOST is described in the plenitude of His gifts and graces, under the sevenfold symbol of perfection—"like the seven prismatic colours in the one ray of light;"—"the seven spirits which are before His throne." * And inverting the wonted order of enumeration, he closes with the more lengthened adoration of the Divine SON. This embraces a beautiful fourfold description. "The Faithful Witness,"—He who came to bear witness to the truth—the Revealer of the Father: "the First-begotten of the dead"—the conqueror of the last Enemy—the first-fruits of them that sleep: "the Prince of the kings of the earth—the mighty Ruler seated on

* See Trench and Alford *in loca.*

the throne of universal empire, and of whom it had been predicted, “I will make him my First-born, higher than the kings of the earth :” adding the yet more endearing delineation, which the Apostle of Love of all men was best qualified to give—(shall we say with a tear in his eye?)—“Him that loved” (or rather, in the present tense—“that *loves*) us;” (who loving His own at the beginning, loves with a deathless, unswerving love unto the end), “and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us”—as the words may be rendered according to the preferable reading in all the older MSS.—“a kingdom—priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” Having appropriately concluded his preface with this doxology, we expect he will now proceed to put in writing the august communications, whether in the shape of letter or vision, which had been made to him. But as the succession of bright picturings pass before his mental eye, he interrupts the narrative, in order that he may add one sentence—interject one preliminary reference to that Great event to which all theology—all history—all time points. His inmost burdened thoughts seem to find relief in the triumphant exclamation, “Behold, HE COMETH with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen” (ver. 7).

Owing to the important place the theme occupies in the Book, and in order more effectually to rivet upon it the attention of the reader, we may be forgiven so soon

reiterating the assertion dwelt upon in the Preface, that this last ejaculation takes its befitting place in the introduction, as the “Key-note” of all the divine music which seems to swell and circulate in the subsequent heavenly visions. We repeat, “the glorious appearing of the Great God our Saviour,” as it thus meets us on the threshold, so it is interwoven with the faithful counsels to the Seven Churches. It blends with the intermediate Revelations. It is the last utterance when the vision and the prophecy are sealed up—the last voice heard amid the roll of apocalyptic thunders—“I COME quickly; surely I COME QUICKLY.” While the Evangelist, just as he is awaking from his entranced dream,—when the golden Temple-gates are closing, and the heavenly glories vanishing from his sight—breathes the fervent prayer, “Even so, COME, Lord Jesus ! ”

One other point has still to be noted in these preliminary verses. It is the Day on which this Revelation was made (ver. 10): “I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day.” The Day whose morning sun, to the forlorn exile, rose bright with the remembrance of a completed redemption :—when he loved in thought to enter afresh the vacant sepulchre, and listen in trembling transport to the words of the angels. The Day on which, ever since that Great Easter, he had been in the habit of meeting with the faithful to keep the simple commemorative feast, and which in spirit he sought, even in his present solitude, to keep still. The Lord’s Day ! The present may have possibly—probably—been one of special prayer. The aged Apostle, with all the fire of former love un-

quenched, may have been wrestling at the mercy-seat, breathing oft and again his favourite supplication, “COME, Lord Jesus, COME quickly!” He is heard while yet speaking! That rising sun brings with it the glories of a Pentecostal Sabbath:—“I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day.” By this expression he would seem to denote that he was in a state of holy rapture and ecstasy—‘withdrawn from earthly things, like Moses on Sinai, or Elijah on Carmel.’ The material element, for the time being, was subordinated to the spiritual. The windows of the outer senses were closed, and the entranced and illuminated inner eye became cognizant of a higher world of divine realities. Whether it was in the darkness and silence of his dungeon-vault, or in the traditional cave already referred to as still pointed out on the southern rocks of Patmos;—or when, rapt in meditation, he wandered companionless on the shore, listening to the music of the *Æ*gean waves, we know not. But of this we may feel assured, never had John seen such a Sabbath, and never could he see such again, until the earnest and emblem were exchanged for the full vision and fruition of the eternal Sabbath above. What sights! what sounds! what forms! what scenery!—fit recompense surely for years of conflict and toil. The solitary place was made glad. What Christian Church was ever consecrated like this? Where the most magnificent Sanctuary made with hands that has ever witnessed such glory? The worshipper—one lonely exile. His temple—a rock in mid-ocean. The theme he listens to—the Church-militant,—its sufferings—its

triumphs—its eternal rewards. The Preacher, no earthly ambassador—but his adorable Lord, arrayed in the lustres of His exalted humanity. Oh! never did the tones of the Sabbath-bell fall so joyfully on the ear, as when the expatriated Pilgrim was startled from his bended knees by the trumpet-voice exclaiming, “I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last!” At the moment, indeed, as we shall find, he is struck down trembling and astonished. He is unable to bear the uncreated brightness that unexpectedly burst upon him. But a gentle Hand raises him up, and well-remembered tones restore confidence and inspire love. The tears of banishment are dried. He is made to forget the absence of a loved brotherhood of disciples and saints, in the presence of ONE who ‘sticketh closer than a brother.’

What Christ was to John, He is to His people still. How oft does He convert their times of trial into seasons of special consolation! How often is the couch of sickness and the chamber of bereavement made a Patmos, where the bereft and exiled soul, shut out from the world, holds sweet converse with its Redeeming Lord,—an island in the world’s heaving ocean of vicissitude, made resplendent with the glories of Jesus and eternity! He seems oftentimes to lay low in the dust earthly hopes and refuges—desolating homes and friendships, making the world itself a Patmos, only to prepare, as He disciplined John, for an apocalypse of *Himself*. How many, thus driven by the windy storm and tempest to the crevices of the Rock of Ages, have had from its shelter-

ing clefts such realising views of a Saviour's presence, and enjoyed such hallowed experiences of a Saviour's love, as to make earth's darkest spots of sorrow radiant with the bliss of a foretasted heaven !

“Behold HE COMETH,”—“Surely I COME QUICKLY !” let these words, beginning and closing the “Memories of Patmos,” ring in our ears (like a matin and vesper bell) chimes of joy and hope—peals of warning and of solemn preparation. Nearly twenty centuries indeed have elapsed since they were uttered, and still the world holds on its course,—the trance of the ages has not been broken by this assured manifestation of the Redeemer's glorified Person. We put our ear to the earth: there is heard no sound of His chariot-wheels. There is nothing in the unvarying sequences of outer nature;—there is nothing in past history or in present experience—to indorse and countersign this predicted imminency of the Advent. Be it so—“ Yet a little while and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.” Some may indulge unseemly levity as to the apparent stultifying of the Divine declaration—the bridal lamps kept trimmed in hourly expectancy of the Bridegroom's approach, while no footfall for weary centuries has been heard. But of this we may be assured, that He to whom a thousand years are as one day, has some wise and sufficient reasons alike for the apparent delay, and for the urgent transmission from age to age of the stirring and ever-needful prophetic watchword.* One of these reasons doubtless is, that “He is long-suffering to usward; not willing

* Some of these will be more fully considered in a future chapter.

that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Ay, when we shall be at last permitted to take our stand on the shores of the true Glassy sea, with the Harps of God, and before us the unmeasured cycles of a limitless future, we shall then, by the use of a higher than earthly calculus, be brought to see how brief after all was the period of probation, and to vindicate the verity and truthfulness of the Divine utterance —"Surely I come QUICKLY!"

"BLESSED ARE THOSE SERVANTS WHO WHEN THEIR LORD COMETH SHALL BE FOUND WATCHING."

B

II.

The Trumpet-Voice and Opening Vision.

“I WAS IN THE SPIRIT ON THE LORD’S DAY, AND HEARD BEHIND ME A GREAT VOICE, AS OF A TRUMPET, SAYING, I AM ALPHA AND OMEGA, THE FIRST AND THE LAST: AND, WHAT THOU SEEST, WRITE IN A BOOK, AND SEND IT UNTO THE SEVEN CHURCHES WHICH ARE IN ASIA; UNTO EPHESUS, AND UNTO SMYRNA, AND UNTO PERGAMOS, AND UNTO THYATIRA, AND UNTO SARDIS, AND UNTO PHILADELPHIA, AND UNTO LAODICEA. AND I TURNED TO SEE THE VOICE THAT SPAKE WITH ME. AND, BEING TURNED, I SAW SEVEN GOLDEN CANDLESTICKS: AND IN THE MIDST OF THE SEVEN CANDLESTICKS ONE LIKE UNTO THE SON OF MAN, CLOTHED WITH A GARMET DOWN TO THE FOOT, AND GIRT ABOUT THE PAPS WITH A GOLDEN GIRDLE. HIS HEAD AND HIS HAIRS WERE WHITE LIKE WOOL, AS WHITE AS SNOW; AND HIS EYES WERE AS A FLAME OF FIRE; AND HIS FEET LIKE UNTO FINE BRASS, AS IF THEY BURNED IN A FURNACE; AND HIS VOICE AS THE SOUND OF MANY WATERS. . . . HIS COUNTENANCE WAS AS THE SUN SHINETH IN HIS STRENGTH.”—REV. I. 10-16.

THE TRUMPET-VOICE AND OPENING VISION.

IN the preceding chapter we considered the prologue and dedication of this great Book. He who is alike the Revealer and the Revealed is now to occupy our attention. It is a befitting sequence, to pass from the announcement of the subject, to a description of the adorable Person and character of Him whose tongue of living fire dictates the immediately succeeding letters to the Seven Churches, —whose Presence fills every subsequent unfolding of the prophetic roll, and whose glorious Advent is the culminating event—the terminating act of the sacred drama.

But under what form is this description of the august Being, who dwelleth in light inaccessible, to be brought before His Church? How can even John (though the Eagle be his traditional symbol) soar upwards on his wings of love and devotion to catch a sight of the Invisible—endure the splendours of the unclouded Sun—and present the result in human words? It cannot be embodied in the usual forms of speech;—and, therefore, in accordance with many antecedents in Hebrew history, this revelation of the Person of Christ is to be made, not in earthly *language*, but by heavenly *vision*. Ages before, the greatest of all *historic* revelations of Himself and His ways (in the Exodus and wanderings) was preceded by the “*appearing*” of the Cove-

nant Angel to the Shepherd of Midian in the burning bush as the Great I AM. Now, in the greatest of all *prophetic* revelations, the same Almighty Being manifests forth His Person and resurrection glory, not in the desert's flaming bush nor from the cleft rock, but amid the scenery and furniture of Tabernacle and Temple,—amid golden Candlesticks and other symbols and accessories most familiar and hallowed to a Jew. On the day commemorative of his Lord's rising from the dead, the aged Apostle of Patmos, as we have already seen, is startled with "a great voice as of a trumpet." Probably in this there was yet another Jewish memorial and association.* A sound broke upon his ear similar to that with which the Israelite was so familiar, when the festal trumpet summoned to some great convocation—or rather, perhaps, recalling those ominous blasts heard in times of terror, and rebuke, and war. Never, at all events, was there a grander meaning than now, attached to the wonted summons which accompanied these trumpet-tones—"Prepare to meet THY God, O Israel!" John turns round, awe-struck and astonished. It was no phantasy—no ideal voice, such as, in the devout imagination of the Greek, haunted mountain and cave and waters,—but the living presence of a Living Being, who announced Himself as the "Alpha and Omega, the first and the last." The direction, moreover, was added, that what was about to be uttered was not for the Solitary of Patmos only, but for "the Churches in Asia"—not for John the Divine alone—but, through these seven

* See Hengstenberg *in loco*.

congregations of that province, as a directory for the people of God, in every age, to the end of time. It was, therefore, to be written "in a Book"—engrossed in a Scroll—as dictated by the lips of the Church's adorable Head. Very possibly these tones, as we have just indicated, suggested not so much the silver trumpets of jubilee, as those which would prepare the listener for communications of retribution and judgment, such as were heard in a future vision—"Woe, woe, woe to the inhabiters of the earth."

Let us turn then aside, like Moses of old, with reverent gaze, to see this great sight;—it is a Vision alike of sublimity and comfort. May the Holy Spirit, whose special office it is to take of the things of Christ and show them unto His people, enable us so to behold His glory, that we may be led to exclaim, "I have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts!"

Reserving for the present the consideration of the Seven golden Candlesticks and other accompanying symbols, we have here successively described to us the *Garment*, the *Girdle*, the *Hair*, the *Eyes*, the *Feet*, the *Voice*, the *Sword*, and *Countenance* of the Divine Redeemer.

The First thing which seems to have arrested the attention of the Apostle was his Lord's GARMENT: He was "*clothed with a garment down to the foot.*" The long flowing robe, partly sacerdotal, partly regal,—but more the former than the latter,—suggests the first of many resemblances to the visions of Daniel, when on the

banks of the Hiddekel he saw the man clothed in the long linen garment. In both cases they pointed to the Royal Priest—"the Priest upon His throne"—the God-man Intercessor. The ungirded robe flowing down to the feet, further indicating perhaps, repose*—absence of toil—release from labour;—in other words, that He who was thus attired had finished His work, fought His great fight;—His loins no longer girded for conflict, He had entered on His glorious rest. There were other awful emblems of Divine majesty there, which we might rather have supposed would have first claimed John's attention. He fastens on the one which formed the badge of his Lord's mediatorial character and office, which enabled him to see God and live. "I saw," said he, "One like unto the Son of Man." SON OF MAN—blessed title!—the name by which the adorable Person now revealed called Himself on earth,—He loves it still, and wears it still in heaven. In the glorified lips which were about to whisper, in mingled omnipotence and love, "Fear not!" the Evangelist recognises the same which in trembling accents from the cross once called him "Son!" When we remember that John himself was now bowed down with a load of sorrows—a dark midnight of persecution at hand for himself and the Church of God, need we wonder that when the Church's living Head appears, he should have singled out first what reminded and assured him of his Beloved Master's undying manhood? It afforded the certain pledge and guarantee that, though the faithful

* Bengel.

in that and in other ages might be destined to pass through the severest ordeal of suffering, there was One at the right hand of the Throne (the same who had been disclosed to the dying eye of the martyr Stephen) who could say from dear-bought experience, "I know your sorrows."

Again, he beheld His GIRDLE: "*He was girt with a golden girdle.*" This was the symbol alike of His Truth, His Unchangeableness, and Love. The Apostle had just noted that which revealed his Lord to be "full of grace;" when he saw the golden girdle it confirmed him in the assurance of whose glory it was he beheld—"the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father,"—not only "full of *Grace*," but "full of *Truth*," of whom the Prince of Prophets had predicted—"Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins."

Moreover, it was the pledge and badge of His unaltered and unalterable Love. Since John had last held visible fellowship with his Redeemer, that Redeemer had been enthroned amid the Hosannahs of Angels and the glories of Heaven. The question may possibly have oft suggested itself—Is He changed? Have sixty years of ascension glories dimmed His love, or alienated His affection? Can He be "that same Jesus" who, during His ministry on earth, called His disciples 'friends,' and whom, from the heights of Bethany, they had seen go into heaven? Has He still the Brother's eye, and the Brother's love, and the Brother's heart? That golden Girdle afforded silent testimony that, though altered in

His outward estate and condition, His name and memorial—His inviolable attachment to His people—knew no change. That name is “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.” Unlike the similar girdle of fine gold of Uphaz, in Daniel’s vision, which encircled the loins, this was girded around the Redeemer’s breast—around His very Heart of love. Immutability must become mutable, before that Love be altered or that Affection die!

But the glorified Humanity of Christ is not of itself enough for His Church. The arm that is to save a world, and wield the sceptre of universal Empire, must have the omnipotence of Deity slumbering there,—our God, yet our Brother; our Brother, yet our God! The beloved Disciple accordingly, having so far had his fears allayed by a revelation of his Lord’s exalted manhood, proceeds to contemplate the symbols of His Godhead—His four-fold attributes of *Eternity, Omniscience, Holiness, and Power.*

His ETERNITY: “*His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow.*” The Ancient of days who appeared to Daniel now stands before him. There is a remarkable identity here also in the two picturings, and in nothing more than in this significant emblem.* It is the echo and response in vision, of the spectator’s own magnificent exordium—“In the beginning was the Word,

* We are aware not a few commentators make it rather the symbol of majesty or glory. But we prefer adhering to the interpretation of Augustine and others.

and the Word was with God, and THE WORD WAS GOD." It is the translation into symbol of the preliminary announcement which had just accompanied the great trumpet: "I am Alpha and Omega." Wondrous theme of contemplation! Christ "set up from everlasting, from the beginning, ere ever the earth was." Ere the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted their jubilant anthem over a new-born world,—in the remote recesses of the past—ere the trance of Eternity had been broken by any manifestation of Divine power,—He was rejoicing in the presence of the Un-created One, Himself the Uncreated Lord! Well did he who spake of "the Child born, the Son given, the Prince of peace," celebrate Him also as "the Wonderful, the Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father," (or, as the words may be rendered, the Father of ETERNITY).

Again John gazes, and lo! His OMNISCIENCE: "*His eyes were as a flame of fire,*" Penetrating in searching scrutiny every corner of creation,—darting down the vista of the future, and bringing up from its remotest depths material for His servant to register in his prophetic roll,—scanning with lightning speed the destinies of His Church, until the last shadow had been cast on earth's dial. And what Christ was to John, He is to His Church still. These flaming eyes are still abroad at this moment, through every remote avenue of the universe, roaming the tracts of immensity; and yet not more there than *here*,—above us, around us, within us. Comforting and yet fearful truth! Comforting;—that there is not

the lonely spot or desolate heart where the cognizance and sympathy of Christ are not;—that these flaming Eyes—the same which once wept over human sorrow and bereavement, human impenitence and guilt—are watching the heaving of every burdened sigh, and the falling of every tear;—that they reach the martyr in his cell, and the exile in his Patmos, and the sufferer on his sick-bed, and the saint at the threshold of the Dark Valley. But dread thought also! Christ's eye upon me! All things naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do! That eye a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart;—no deed of darkness to be screened from His view,—no sin, undetected by man, unnoted and unregistered by the Great Heart-Searcher! “If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities—O Lord, who shall stand?”

But if His Omniscience be such, what of His HOLINESS and PURITY. This is what the Apostle next beheld: “*His feet like unto fine*” (or, as it has been translated, heated or glowing) “*brass,* as if they burned in a furnace.*” How unsullied! how spotless! Even the Seraphim—“the burning ones” in the vision of Isaiah—with twain of their wings *covered* their feet, in token of imperfection. But Christ's feet are here uncovered. Why? Because the purity of the holiest created intelligences is a derived purity—His is underived. The one is finite—the other infinite. The one is the softened and borrowed lustre of the satellite—the other the great cen-

* χαλκολίθανος, an enigmatical term—supposed to be formed most probably by John himself. It is used once more in chap. ii. 18.

tral Luminary of Heaven—the Fountain of light and life and glory! Let us not lose sight of this doctrine—the untainted holiness of the God-man Mediator. He was the true paschal Lamb—“without blemish.” As one leak would sink the mightiest vessel that was ever borne on the waters, so never could the Church ride out the storm, had not her living Head—the true Ark—been “the Holy One of God.” He rose “glorious in Holiness.” He ascended with the song vibrating through the ranks of Heaven, “Holy, holy, holy!” “Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness !”

One other attribute still remains: John heard His VOICE—(emblem of power)—it was “*as the sound of many waters.*” Of no attribute did the Evangelist require to be more certified than this—that the Church whose destinies were about to be unfolded to him, should be able to claim as her King and Head, One boundless in His resources—strong to smite, strong to save. And accordingly, as if doubly to strengthen and confirm his confidence in the ability of his Lord, his attention is immediately arrested by another emblem of almighty—the two-edged Sword proceeding from His mouth. So that the Apostle in Patmos could take the Psalmist’s language and say, “God hath spoken once—yea, *twice* have I heard this, that POWER belongeth unto God.” Believer! art thou encompassed with trouble? Are the floods lifting up their waves, and making a mighty noise? Christ’s Voice is “as the sound,”—nay, says the Psalmist, “it is mightier than the noise of many waters

—yea, than the mighty waves of the sea.” That Voice has only to utter the mandate, “Peace, be still!” and immediately there will be a great calm. Whatever be thy troubles, thy fears, thy misgivings—all power is committed unto Him in heaven and in earth. As a Prince, He has power with God and must prevail. The lowly prayer from a burdened saint ascends;—the omnipotent “*Father, I will,*” irrevocably secures the boon; “Son! thou art ever with Me, and all that I have is Thine!”

The Apostle’s closing description in the vision is the fulgent COUNTEANCE of Immanuel: “*His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.*” The Church in the Canticles is said to be “fair as the moon;”—her lustre is not inherent; like that of the Seraphim we have just spoken of, it is derived. But the Church’s Lord and King is in the spiritual universe, what the sun of heaven is in the natural,—nothing has any glory by reason of the glory that excelleth;—Christ being all and in all. His countenance is like the cloudless splendour of the brightest noon! While blessed it is, to bask under the sunshine of that Countenance whose smile is heaven, whose favour is life—fearful is it to provoke that righteous wrath which is worse than death! The Countenance of Christ is like the two-edged sword. It has a double brightness;—or rather, it is like the forked lightning—if it does not illumine, it must scathe. While we read of those who are to hail the bright and morning Star, we read of others who are to be “destroyed with the brightness of His coming.” May it be ours, like Israel of old

with their guiding pillar, to walk in the light of His countenance. This is the Countenance which we are told, at the close of this Book, is in a world of glory to displace and supersede all material luminaries. No sun needed in heaven to walk the firmament—no moon with her starry retinue to shed their radiance ;—“ for there shall be no night there, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever.”

III.

The Accessories of the Vision.

"AND I TURNED TO SEE THE VOICE THAT SPAKE WITH ME. AND, BEING TURNED, I SAW SEVEN GOLDEN CANDLESTICKS : AND IN THE MIDST OF THE SEVEN CANDLESTICKS ONE LIKE UNTO THE SON OF MAN, . . . AND HE HAD IN HIS RIGHT HAND SEVEN STARS. . . . AND WHEN I SAW HIM, I FELL AT HIS FEET AS DEAD. AND HE LAID HIS RIGHT HAND UPON ME, SAYING UNTO ME, FEAR NOT; I AM THE FIRST AND THE LAST : I AM HE THAT LIVETH, AND WAS DEAD ; AND, BEHOLD, I AM ALIVE FOR EVERMORE, AMEN ; AND HAVE THE KEYS OF HELL AND OF DEATH. WRITE THE THINGS WHICH THOU HAST SEEN, AND THE THINGS WHICH ARE, AND THE THINGS WHICH SHALL BE HEREAFTER ; THE MYSTERY OF THE SEVEN STARS WHICH THOU SAWEST IN MY RIGHT HAND, AND THE SEVEN GOLDEN CANDLESTICKS. THE SEVEN STARS ARE THE ANGELS OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES ; AND THE SEVEN CANDLESTICKS WHICH THOU SAWEST ARE THE SEVEN CHURCHES."

—REV. I. 12, 13, 16, 17-20.

THE ACCESSORIES OF THE VISION.

WE pass from the Vision of the Lord Jesus, to a brief consideration of its accompaniments or accessories. These are threefold :—*The seven Golden Candlesticks : the Stars He holds in His right Hand : and the Keys of Hell (Hades) and of Death.*

THE GOLDEN CANDLESTICKS—the first of the many golden emblems we shall meet with in this Book—unquestionably denote the Church of Christ. The purest and rarest of the precious metals is taken to symbolize that, whose preciousness can best be estimated by the price paid for its redemption—“ Christ also loved the Church, and gave *Himself* for it.” The figure takes us at once back in thought, to the sacred furniture of a now waning, or rather, abrogated dispensation—to the one candlestick, with its branches or lamps, in the Tabernacle of the wilderness and the Holy place of the Temple ;—reminding us also of the similar beautiful and suggestive vision of the Prophet Zechariah, when he saw the candlestick “ all of gold,” with its seven lamps fed from the upper bowl (or reservoir) of olive oil (Zech. iv.) There is a remarkable and most notable difference, however, in this vision of St John, from these Old Testament configurations. It is not the one candelabrum, the solid central shaft of gold, with its six dependent lamps, which

is here represented; but it is among seven distinct and separate candlesticks, the Divine Personage is seen walking. Who can fail to discern and appreciate the beauty and appropriateness of the distinction? The Jewish Tabernacle and Temple-lamp which rose before the Prophet's eye, were symbolic of the Church of God in its relation to the kingdom and economy of Israel. That ancient Church for ages stood alone in the earth as the Divine 'light giver.' But no sooner did the Jewish dispensation cease, than the Temple-lamps were separated. The Christian Church, though one in essence and spirit, is no longer one in outward or visible unity, but constituted of many parts; these, it may be, widely removed from each other. Jesus Himself, the alone Illuminator, is represented as moving in their midst, their common bond of union. It is no longer one planet, but a system, of which He is the glorious sun and centre.* John had in his opening Gospel declared, "In Him was life, and the Life was the light of men." No candlestick, no church shines of itself;—from Him its light emanates. And the Church in Heaven, as already noted, is in this respect only the grander complement and counterpart of the Church on earth. In her august Temple, the same Divine Illumination is perpetuated through eternal ages,

* See Trench's observations (page 29). Elliot also remarks in a note: "It would seem from the scriptural account, that the seven branches of the Jewish Temple lamp-sconces were removable from the central chandelier: perhaps to typify how, under a future dispensation (viz., the Gentile), the Church would lose the form of visible unity that it had possessed under the Jewish, and be scattered in its different branches over the world."—*Horæ Apoc.*, vol. i., p. 73.

—“The Lord God almighty and the Lamb are the light thereof.”

But as no ~~christian~~ can live by its own light—by sparks of its own kindling, so neither can it maintain its existence if it fail to scatter and diffuse its derived glory all around. Woe to any such, which professes to walk in the light of its Divine Head, and yet absorbs the God-given rays—keeps with niggard hand that which was given it to disperse and radiate to earth’s circumference. The parable which condemns the faithless servant who hid his lord’s money, condemns also by implication the traitor church which refuses to be evangelistic—caring alone for its own well-being, not for others. The absorber of spiritual light becomes in its turn the receptacle of darkness, and serves itself heir to the most solemn warning its rejected Lord ever uttered—“If, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness !”

But, further, the Christ of Patmos is seen in the vision having SEVEN STARS in His right hand: “*And He had in His right hand seven stars*” :—holding them, as has been supposed, not like a ring encircling, but as a wreath or garland. These stars are the emblems of rulers ecclesiastical and civil.* Christ holding these, and holding them in His right hand—the seat of power and strength—the hand which grasps the reins of empire

* “Ecclesiastical rulers where ecclesiastical things are concerned—secular rulers where the subject is of secular things:—e.g., ‘A woman having on her head a crown of twelve stars’ (xii. 1); ‘And his tail (the Dragon’s) drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth’ (xii. 4).”—ELLIOT, p. 75.

—tells far more powerfully than words, that all the subsequent actors in this prophetic scroll are under His supervision and control: as much so as the stars and planets in the material heavens. In a spiritual and figurative sense it may be said, that He “binds the sweet influences of the Pleiades, looses the bands of Orion, and guides Arcturus with his sons.” Walking among the candlesticks and having the stars in His hand, together assure us that no church faithful to Him need fear destruction—no lamp can be extinguished, nor star plucked from that gemmed garland, which has the hand of Omnipotence to protect it. If one unfaithful star fall from its setting, He will have another ready to take its place. Seven—“the number of mystical completeness”—can suffer no diminution. Special churches may cease to shine and cease to be; but the Church itself is imperishable. God’s Old Testament apostrophe to His spiritual Zion is a motto for all time—“Behold, I have engraven thee on the palms of my hands, and thy walls are continually before me.”

The next accompanying symbols are THE KEYS OF HELL (or rather of Hades) and DEATH, suspended by His side. Christ having Himself endured the sharpness of death, not only has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers; but as that kingdom is entered through the dark gateway (with its gloomy portcullis) of dissolution and the grave, He is described here as the Warder of these also. The whole region of Hades and the invisible spirit-land is under His sway. That ‘undiscovered country’ many a traveller has entered. Since our different lives

began, millions on millions have passed through the mysterious shades into darkness, and not so much as a solitary unit of these has come back to throw one ray of light on the silent regions. No warrior, like David's three men of might, has burst through the interposing barriers and returned to tell the wished-for tale. But the Lord of life has stormed the domain and citadel of Death ;—the 'Stronger than the strong' has assailed the otherwise impregnable ramparts,—plucked the crown from the King of Terrors,—taken from him the Keys—the badges of possession and power—and converted that sombre portico into an arch of triumph, bearing the inscription, "Who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light!"

The Apostle, overwhelmed with the magnificence and glory of the Divine vision, had fallen at the feet of his Lord 'as one dead.' Yes! despite of all his old confidential intercourse and favoured familiarity, he cowers like a terror-stricken child, beneath the unveiled majesty of the great Heart-Searcher,—just as the loftiest archangel is said to feel profoundest humility, because permitted to be nearest the glorious Being before whom he casts his crown. But John listens to the brief reassuring words "*Fear not!*"—words which may have recalled other occasions besides the Mount of Transfiguration and the night on the Sea of Tiberias. And on what grounds is he told to dismiss his fears? Is the exhortation 'Fear not: for you are in the presence of the same Lord who called you at Bethsaida—who sat

by you at the Last Supper—who confided to you the sacred charge from the cross—who met you at early morn on the lake shore, and left you with hands extended in blessing?’ No! He quiets His servant’s misgivings by a double revelation of Himself, as the Conqueror of Death, and as a living, Life-giving Redeemer: “I am the Living One; I was dead:” “I am living” (as the words may be rendered) “unto the ages of the ages!” It is enough—the Apostle asks no more. Moreover, feeling the touch of the august Personage (for He laid His right hand upon him), he rises from his posture of prostration and crouching awe. Death is denuded of its fearfulness. The vision and its great words have nerved him for the task that is now to be assigned to him, of transcribing what is about to be unfolded. He seems to say, “I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord!”

“Write,” says the Divine voice to His now reassured servant, “write what thou hast *now seen*,” as well as “the things that are, and the things that shall be.” For behoof of my Church universal, record that which has now passed before thine eyes, that all men may have some feeble apprehension of the glories of my Divine Person within the veil: what I have done;—what I am still doing, as the Great High Priest, the Vanquisher of death, the Ruler of the invisible world. “Write,” not for thyself, but for the ages. Unknown to thee, thou wilt thereby soothe many a sorrow and dry many a tear!

The Reader cannot fail to observe the peculiar appro-

priateness and adaptation of the vision with its accompaniments, for the time at which it was given. John, as we have already noted, was now the sole remaining representative of the Apostolic Church. He alone had lived to see on the political horizon, wrathful storms brooding against the Christian name; and if he himself were soon to be permitted to close his eyes in death, and thank God that he was taken from the evil to come, well he knew that those on whom his mantle and spirit were to fall, would have a legacy of suffering bequeathed to them;—that they would be called upon to bear, in its heaviest severity, the martyr's cross, ere they obtained the martyr's crown! If, then, the Apocalyptic Roll about to be unfolded to him, like that of Ezekiel, was to be written in characters of 'lamentation and mourning and woe,' what more comforting vision could be given, than the Church's King and Head appearing in the midst of the Church itself, which was to be the theatre of suffering—in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks and with the stars in His right hand; wearing the garb of glorified humanity; and yet with all the symbols of regal might—the avenger of His saints, the conqueror of their foes? The Vision speaks! The Lord has the same motto and watchword to give His Church too, in her collective capacity, in fighting her battles, as He had just given His servant personally. It is that **HE IS HER LIVING REDEEMER!** “*Fear not: I am He that liveth: Behold! I am alive for evermore!*” The Children of Zion may well be joyful in their King: the thunders may awake their fury, the vials may

descend, the tempests may sweep,—for she can listen to the living voice of her living Head—“I am He that liveth!” and because He *lives*, she shall live *also*. Yes, beautiful vision! Christ with the “stars in His right hand;”—Christ with His ministers—Christ with His earthly potentates; Christ King of Zion—ay, Christ King of nations:—Christ retaining faithful watchmen on the Church’s battlements, who, in times of deepest rebuke, and apostasy, and blasphemy, will not hold their peace day nor night—Christ declaring that ‘the shields of the earth are only His,’—controlling the projects of her haughty potentates alike for the chastisement and prosperity of His people,—and then, when they have done their work, scattering them as chaff before the whirlwind. Oh! when John had the first startling intimation of this Divine apparition in Patmos—when he heard the trumpet heralding his Lord’s approach, saw the bright blaze of glory projected from His path, and listened to the announcement in whose presence he was—“I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last,”—he might have expected, on turning round, to gaze on some dazzling throne gleaming with the coruscations of Truth, and Holiness, and Righteousness,—tiers of attendant angels and burning seraphim lining the celestial pathway! But more comforting far is it to the exiled Seer and to the Church of Christ to the end of time, to behold a simpler and less imposing vision—the Lord holding merely a cluster of stars in His hand, and encircled with seven golden candlesticks, proclaiming the perpetuity of His media-

torial sway. “Fear not! I am He that liveth.” “God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; the Lord shall help her, and that right early.”

Church of the living God! how wondrous your privileges! In a succeeding chapter, we have a sublime glimpse given us of Heaven, where Christ is represented in the midst of His redeemed, summoning forth—as ‘the Lamb that was slain’—a loud anthem from ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands. But here we have Him in gracious love, moving in the midst of the Church-militant;—feeding each candlestick with the oil of His grace—and keeping every star in its sphere in the firmament. And the beauty of the vision is, that it is not Christ dealing only with His Church universal—keeping the oil from decaying, and the gold from tarnishing, and the stars from starting from their orbits and drifting uncontrollably into outer darkness;—but we have in this exquisitely tender dealing with John, an assurance of what He is, and is willing to be, to every individual believer—the poorest, the humblest, the meanest, the most obscure;—though his heart be a Patmos—lonely and desolate; and his home be a desert rock, or a dungeon of captivity, or a hut of poverty, or a chamber of disease, or a bed of death,—*there* He is, to lay his right hand of love on the trembling one, and say, “**FEAR NOT.**” *Fear not!* thou poor sinner, trembling under the load of thy guilt: ‘I am He that was dead;’ My death is thy life, My blood thy plea, My cross the passport to thy crown. *Fear not!* thou weak and faint-hearted, borne down under thy corruptions, the strength

of thy temptations, the weakness of thy graces, the lukewarmness of thy love: 'I am alive for evermore.' My grace will be sufficient for thee. *Fear not!* suffering one: thou art contending with a great fight of afflictions;—trial after trial, like wave after wave, rolling in upon thee: thy house hath been swept, ties have been broken, graves opened, the tear scarce dry when made to flow again. *Fear not!* 'I have the keys of the grave and of death.' Not one deathbed has been ordered, not one grave dug, not one tear permitted, without My bidding. Art thou not satisfied when a Living Redeemer has the Keys of Death suspended from His girdle? in whose keeping could they be better than in His? Art thou afraid to die? Is the thought of death, of thy coming dissolution, fearful to thee? '*Fear not! I was dead!*' I have sanctified that grave and that dark valley, by traversing it all before thee: I am the abolisher of Death, and to all my people I have made the gate of Death and the gate of Heaven one!

Reader, do *you* know this ever-living, never-dying Saviour? With the triumphant faith of a saint who lived thousands of years antecedent to the Apostle of Patmos, can you say—"I know that my Redeemer liveth?" Jesus liveth! then perish every desponding thought. Jesus liveth! then though heart and flesh faint and fail, He will be the strength of my heart and my portion for ever. Jesus liveth! the Living among the dead—Faithful among the faithless—Changeless among the changeable—the only unfailing, unvarying Friend in a failing, varying world. Jesus liveth! then when Christ

who is our life shall appear, we shall also appear with Him in glory. Like John, we will fall down at His feet and exclaim, "THIS GOD SHALL BE OUR GOD FOR EVER AND EVER!"

IV.

The Epistles to the Seven Churches.

"UNTO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS WRITE; . . . UNTO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA WRITE; . . . TO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN PERGAMOS WRITE; . . . UNTO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA WRITE; . . . UNTO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN SARDIS WRITE; . . . TO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA WRITE; . . . UNTO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH OF THE LAODICEANS WRITE; . . . HE THAT HATH AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAITH UNTO THE CHURCHES."—REV. II. 1, 8, 12, 18; III. 1, 7, 14, 22.

THE EPISTLES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES.

A well-known commentator on the *Apocalypse** has graphically pictured the aged Evangelist ascending one of the rocky heights of **PATMOS**, and from thence, as a centre, beholding on every side, even at that early dawn of the Christian era, undoubted evidences of the spread of the Gospel. Flourishing churches were planted all around, far beyond the line of the visible horizon. In Greece, those of **Philippi** and **Thessalonica**, **Berea**, **Athens**, and **Corinth**; in the East, **Jerusalem** and **Antioch**; in the South, **Cyprus**, **Alexandria**, and **Crete**; westward, in **Cæsar's household** and **Cæsar's capital**; while the bearers of the glad tidings had even left the impress of their early footsteps on the shores of **Gaul** and **Spain**, and our own remote island of **Britain**. He who in his former years had witnessed the whole Church of Christ contained in one upper-room in **Jerusalem**, had lived to see its line gone out through all the earth, and its words to the end of the world.

In that wide sweep—that supposed panoramic prospect, there was one cluster of Christian congregations, which, above all the rest, was peculiarly dear to the Exile, viz., **THE CHURCHES OF ASIA**. Not the Asia we are accustomed to think of, in its wide geographical

* **ELLIOT, *Horæ Apoc.*, vol. i., p. 62.**

acceptation ; not even the Asia Minor,—the peninsula equally familiar to us under the sway of modern Turkey, which embraces a continent in itself ; but a comparatively limited district or province along her western coast line, and of which Ephesus formed the recognised capital.

To these cities and their Churches, John's great Lord commissions him to write seven distinct Epistles or addresses. We are not to understand that seven exhausted the number of congregations of the faithful planted in that region ; for, independent of other testimony, we have reliable information from the Epistles of Ignatius that at least two additional cities, larger than some of those mentioned (Magnesia and Tralles), had Churches in their midst. The number seven was evidently again employed as the type of completeness ;—that same symbol which we have already had occasion to note in regard to the description of the Holy Spirit in His manifold operations—“The seven spirits which are before the throne ;”—the symbol which we shall meet in other significant figurations in subsequent portions of the Book,—*e.g.*, the Lamb having seven horns and seven eyes ; the seven burning lamps before the throne ; or, in the outpourings of Divine judgments, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven thunders, seven vials.

This symbolic number further betokens, that the epistolary addresses were designed as a directory of perpetual obligation for the whole Church Catholic, of all ages and all climes—European as well as Asiatic. The internal condition of these congregations, as unfolded in

the varying language employed, reflects, as in a mirror, the mingled and conflicting aspects and elements which attach in all periods of her history to the Church-militant. They are, if it may be so expressed, cartoons, filled in indeed with their own appropriate details, but in bold outline depicting the ever-varying and diversified features in church life and character—the admixture of wheat with tares, truth with error, zeal with coldness, fidelity with unfaithfulness, light with darkness, life with death. There is *Ephesus*, bold in resolute endurance, discerning, intolerant of departures from the faith, and of all tampering with heathen libertinism ; yet this coupled with lamentable declension from first love. There is *Smyrna*, battling nobly with tribulation and danger in the midst of poverty and suffering, rich in faith and good works. There is *Pergamos*, environed with satanic influences in varied forms and phases—the seat of hostile Jews clinging to the beggarly elements—the professing members of her Christian Church polluted with the defiling doctrines of Antinomianism ; yet the band of faithful and leal-hearted holding fast the true Name in the face of persecution and martyrdom. There is *Thyatira*, amidst charities and zeal and all outward activities, endangered by the seductions of false teachers, those who would set up sensuous and sensual worship, deifying material forms, and encouraging immoral practice. There is *Sardis*, with its few noble exceptions, yet, as a Church, careless, unwatchful, formal, joined to its idols, dying while it lives of spiritual sloth and inanition. There is *Philadelphia*, with its little strength

in the midst of fierce temptations, but keeping resolutely the word of patience, repressing the spirit of evil, strong and loving in its very weakness. There is *Laudicea*, distinguished for its worldly riches, its high-toned profession and spiritual pride; yet lowest in the scale and standard of all, with its perilous lukewarmness,—neither cold nor hot—a religion of vaunting words, devoid of vitality and moral strength—“poor, blind, and naked.” Each individual Church has thus its distinctive peculiarities—its points of danger, and points of strength and safety—its subjects for commendation or rebuke. And hence these seven written messages may be regarded as a charge addressed by the Shepherd and Bishop of souls, through seven representative congregations, to His great diocese of Universal Christendom. There is a word of solemn warning and expostulation to all, against the sins of pride and worldliness—formalism and self-sufficiency—doctrinal and heart apostasy—compromise with error—laxity of life. There is a word of gracious encouragement to the lowly, the suffering, the patient, the faithful, the duty-doing, the good and the true; especially when alive to their spiritual weakness and insufficiency. And more solemnising is the lesson they further convey, that He who spake so familiarly to John of these seven congregations in that early age, is, with the same searching scrutiny, in the midst of all His congregations and churches to this hour, noting with His eyes of flaming fire their faults and errors—their neglects and failures—their sinful departures from truth—their tamperings with error—

their declensions and shortcomings. But ready, too (when He sees their weak faith requires it), with His encouragements and approval—His promises and support—His sympathy and love; and the last more than the first. In a word, these Epistles contain a stereotyped message for all time—as much for us in Britain as for the Orientals of the first century.

Nor is it at all necessary that we should regard the seven Churches, as some writers have done,* as representatives of successive epochs or chronological eras of the Christian faith—describing the evolution of the church-life of future Christendom; as if they resembled the rainbow, the seven-coloured arc of heaven, spanning the centuries from the earthly ministry of our Lord to His second coming—depicting the Ephesian age, the Sardian age, the Laodicean age, and others. Such an interpretation seems alike forced and fanciful; for it is at once manifest, by reference to a map, that the names of the towns are taken in their local order as the Apostle himself may have visited them, beginning naturally with Ephesus—alike from its own pre-eminence and John's association with it—taking a northerly line to Pergamos and Thyatira, then a southerly direction, till the circuit is completed by a return to the great capital of the province. We are abundantly warranted, therefore, rather in asserting that these seven Churches, by a sort of complex unity and symbolism, embrace all periods as well as all characteristics. The lessons embodied in their Epistles are limited to no age or

* This theory is supported by Vitringa, Girdlestone, and others.

circumstances : in common with every other portion of Scripture, they are “written for our admonition.” In the words of good old Bengel, “Whether one may be so dead as the Church of Sardis, or may stand so well as that of Philadelphia, . . . this book is still fitted to be serviceable to him, and the Lord Jesus has something in it to say to him.”

And here may we not pause to remark, how honoured was John to be the instrument in the hand of Christ and of the Divine Spirit, in preparing this legacy for the Church of the future? Mysterious, doubtless, at the time to him and to others, was the Providence which divorced him from the scene of his active labours—his ministries of apostolic love, and condemned him to silence and inaction in the sea-girt isle. But his pen was to achieve more lasting good than all his sermons and spoken utterances. The things which had happened unto him had fallen out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel. His own tongue, with its fervid accents, was for the time dumb, and his bereaved flock would mourn the cruel separation. But the place of his exile is to be consecrated as a temple for mankind—lonely Patmos is to become a spiritual Pharos. The Church throughout all the world is to enjoy the compensating boon to its latest era, in these letters of surpassing faithfulness and comfort, and these visions of surpassing glory. He is shown that there are other ways of glorifying the name and promoting the cause of the Great Master he served, than by an answer to the prayer “O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.” And so is

it still in God's inscrutable dispensations. By these, there are often gracious ends to be subserved, which at the time are indiscernible. The tongue of the dumb has been caused to sing ;—the parched ground has become a pool, and the dry land springs of water. “Men see not yet the bright light in the clouds.” “But it shall come to pass that at evening time it shall be light.”

The form which these seven letters or addresses assume is unique ; or, as it has not unbefittingly been called, *artistic*. They are cast in a similar mould and have a harmony and congruity of parts, which it may be well briefly to notice.*

(1.) They are all addressed to “*the Angel*” of the respective Church—the recognised representative of each congregation. It was a name or term probably borrowed from the presiding functionary, the minister or president, of the Jewish Synagogue.†

(2.) Each letter begins with “These things saith He.” Followed not only with a reference to the glorious Person of the Sender, but embodying some imagery borrowed from His own previous words in the preparatory vision. “These things saith He that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand.” “These things saith the First and the

* See Bengel, Trench, and Alford.

† See Elliot *in loc.* I purposely avoid all reference to the voluminous discussions on this word. Some consider it to refer to a literal Angel ; others find in it the recognition of Episcopal authority—the office of Bishop ; others adopt the Presbyterian view of Moderator—“Primus inter pares.”

Last, who was dead and is alive." "These things saith He which hath the sharp sword with two edges." "These things saith the Son of God, who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire,"—and so on.

(3.) Each Epistle further begins with the impressive, solemnising formula of the Divine omniscience—"I know thy works." The congregations are thus prepared with befitting seriousness and awe to listen to the words of the Great Heart-searcher.

(4.) Each address ends with a phrase concerning conflict and victory, and a promise "to him that overcometh." Moreover, while the first part of the address is couched in plain words, the closing promise is in language of varied and beautiful figure:—the Tree of life—the White stone—the Morning star—the White raiment—the New name—the Heavenly Throne.

(5.) The address to each Church is wound up with the solemn exhortation, refrain, or apostrophe, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches:"—a sacred reminder, that although it is Christ who walks in the midst of the Candlesticks, and Christ who indites those Epistles to His servant John, He does not supersede the office of that Divine Agent of whom He had aforetime said, "He shall glorify me, for He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you." *

* The following additional proofs of the symmetrical structure of these Epistles has been noted by Bishop Wordsworth, in the adaptation of the special warnings and promises to the attribute under which Christ presents Himself to each Church in succession:—"To *Ephesus*.—‘Thus saith He that walketh amid the seven golden lamps’ (v. 1); ‘Repent, or I will re-

One general practical and comforting observation may be further added—that Christ, the Divine Overseer, cares for all His Churches, however great or however small. Perhaps He purposely left out the larger congregation of Magnesia or Tralles, and inserted the Epistle to the comparative handful at almost unknown Thyatira, in order to give the assurance to all faithful associations of Christian men, limited in number and resources—battling it may be for dear life,—that it is not numerical strength or social position, or local influence and importance, which are required to ensure His cognizance and care. The few names in Sardis—the little strength of Philadelphia—the hundreds in Thyatira—as well as the thousands in the teeming marts of Ephesus; the Church among the Valleys of Piedmont—the missionary settlements of the lowly and unlettered Moravians;—the grain of mustard-seed, wherever it has fallen,—each is tended, and watched, and nurtured by the Great Husbandman with patient and discriminating regard. The sublime contrast is alike true and comforting concerning Churches as concerning individuals: “Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom—thy dominion endureth

move thy lamp’ (v. 5). To *Smyrna*.—‘Thus saith the First and the Last, who became *dead* and rose again to *life*’ (v. 8); ‘Be thou faithful unto *death*, and *I will give thee the crown of life*’ (v. 10). To *Pergamos*.—‘Thus saith He that hath the *sharp two-edged sword*’ (v. 12); ‘Repent, or *I will fight against thee with the sword of my mouth*.’ To *Thyatira*.—‘Thus saith the Son of God, who hath His *eyes* like unto a *flame of fire*’ (v. 18); ‘All shall know that I am He that searcheth the reins and hearts.’ To *Philadelphia*.—‘Thus saith He that hath the *key of David, who openeth and no one shutteth*’ (v. 3, 7); ‘I have set before thee an *open door*, which no man can shut,’ ” &c.—WORDSWORTH, *Com.*, pp. 167, 168.

throughout all generations ; (yet) the Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down.” “ In that day sing ye unto her, a vineyard of red wine. I the Lord do keep it: I will water it every moment : lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.” “ A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation.”

Well would it be for us faithfully to hold up that mirror of all these Churches, and see in it the reflection of our individual selves ; to note the warning and the danger-signals as we are careering onwards in life’s swift and speedily-ended journey. How soon, in their case, did the golden age degenerate into the brass and the iron ! Founded in the midst of primitive and apostolic zeal, with the dew of Christian youth upon them, how soon did they lapse into error, apostasy, open sin,—removed away from the faith and hope of the Gospel,—the faithful counsels and burning prayers and tears of earth’s holiest men forgotten, as a dream when one awaketh ! May we not well take home the lessons from their extinguished light and vanished glories ? “ When thou thinkest thou standest, take heed lest thou fall.” “ Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away by the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory, both now and for ever. Amen.”



V.

The Epistle to the Church of Ephesus.

"**U**NTO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS WRITE; THESE THINGS SAITH HE THAT HOLDETH THE SEVEN STARS IN HIS RIGHT HAND, WHO WALKETH IN THE MIDST OF THE SEVEN GOLDEN CANDLESTICKS; I KNOW THY WORKS, AND THY LABOUR, AND THY PATIENCE, AND HOW THOU CANST NOT BEAR THEM WHICH ARE EVIL: AND THOU HAST TRIED THEM WHICH SAY THEY ARE APOSTLES, AND ARE NOT, AND HAST FOUND THEM LIARS: AND HAST BORNE, AND HAST PATIENCE, AND FOR MY NAME'S SAKE HAST LABOURED, AND HAST NOT FAINTED. NEVERTHELESS I HAVE SOMEWHAT AGAINST THEE, BECAUSE THOU HAST LEFT THY FIRST LOVE. REMEMBER THEREFORE FROM WHENCE THOU ART FALLEN, AND REPENT, AND DO THE FIRST WORKS; OR ELSE I WILL COME UNTO THEE QUICKLY, AND WILL REMOVE THY CANDLESTICK OUT OF HIS PLACE, EXCEPT THOU REPENT. BUT THIS THOU HAST, THAT THOU HATEST THE DEEDS OF THE NICOLAITANES, WHICH I ALSO HATE. HE THAT HATH AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAITH UNTO THE CHURCHES; TO HIM THAT OVERCOMETH WILL I GIVE TO EAT OF THE TREE OF LIFE, WHICH IS IN THE MIDST OF THE PARADISE OF GOD."—REV. II. 1-7.

THE EPISTLE TO THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS.

In the previous chapter, we were led to make some preliminary and general observations regarding the Epistles to the Seven Churches of Asia. As we now proceed to the consideration of three of these, let us be solemnised by the reflection, whose utterances they are ;—not those of John ('scribe, instructed in the Kingdom of Heaven,' though he was), but the living words of John's great Master and Lord :—words communicated by the divine teaching and resistless energy of the Spirit of all Truth. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what *the Spirit saith unto the Churches.*"

The first Epistle is that to the metropolitan city of the province—at that time, and for many years afterwards, one of the world's greatest capitals. Any one who has had the melancholy pleasure, as the writer has done, of treading the ruins of Ephesus, can understand, even amid present desolation, how it rose to its proud pre-eminence ;—what that now pestiferous swamp, with its reeds and morasses, must have been, when it formed a spacious harbour for the merchantmen of the *Æ*gean,—the unrivalled temple of Diana, a glittering mass of white marble from the adjoining quarries of Mount Prion, crowning its upper end.

On a height overlooking these, amid the semi-circular seats of its great theatre, a view is still commanded of the entire ancient site, reaching far out to the sea. One can still re-people the solitude with busy life,—fancy the coasting-vessel, which more than once rounded the Island of Samos, bearing on its deck the great Apostle of the Gentiles to the city most tenderly associated with his life and labours. Here, for three years, Paul was engaged in unremitting toil, bodily and mental. Here he encountered the most virulent of persecution. But here, too, he had left behind him the most indubitable proofs of his earnest ministry; for he tells us, “By the space of three years, I ceased not to warn every one day and night with tears” (Acts xx. 31). From the language employed in his ‘Epistle to the Ephesians,’ we can indeed draw no decisive inference, as there are strong grounds for surmising that that Epistle was rather a circular letter addressed to the Churches of the province, than to the individual Church of Ephesus.* But even if the latter were no more than merely included in this most deeply spiritual encyclical, it shows that the Apostle’s sacred lessons had there taken congenial root. It is an Epistle which could only have been understood and appreciated by those “blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ,” and who had been enabled to comprehend, as none other of His converts had, “the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ” (Eph. iii. 18). This Church of glowing zeal and fervour he had afterwards committed to the special charge of his

* See Howson and Conybeare’s St Paul, vol. ii., 410.

son Timothy. And if we can add yet one other to its holy memories, it was when this city of Paul's loving Epistle received in its midst the loving and beloved Apostle, bearing along with him, according to tradition, the most honoured of women—the aged mother of his and her Lord. Someway amid these thorny and tangled thickets of Mount Prion, the dust of the Apostle of Patmos is said to rest. There, as he lived to glorify, so there he waits to welcome, his Saviour at His second coming.

Be that as it may, to this eye of Asia, as it was proudly called—the civil and ecclesiastical centre of the province—the first of these seven inspired messages was sent by the Great Bishop of souls. He who was seen in the vision simply “in the midst of the golden candlesticks”—announces Himself, by a notable variation of phrase, as “*walking*” in their midst,—going about to and fro—from church to church,—from congregation to congregation;—we may add from soul to soul. “*Walking*”—a term suggestive of His unresting, wakeful vigilance. His under-shepherds may sleep, but He that keepeth Israel doth not slumber—He neither slumbers nor sleeps. If these candlesticks were left to faithless man, how oft would the flickering flame languish and die! But He is the true “*Watchman of the house*”—the sleepless Warder of the temple courts. Blessed be God, no church, no individual, is dependent on priest or minister. The presence and sustaining grace of Christ are the secret of all life and light. We are “kept by the power of God.” It is because the great God is

in the bush, that, though burning, it is ever unconsumed.

The Omniscient Saviour now enjoins St John to put on record the grounds of His commendation. He begins with the lights of the picture before filling in the contrasting background. The subjects of approval, as we might have expected, are not few, in the case of a Church which, at all events in its earlier life, had proved itself not unworthy of being made the depositary of such rare means and privileges. “I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.” All this bespeaks a gigantic and prolonged struggle; just such a fierce struggle as we might have looked for with the many-sided adversaries in that city, where cultured Greek, and subtle Oriental, and libertine Roman, and intolerant Jew, combined with the native and bigot votaries of Diana in uncompromising hostility to the faith of Jesus. The Elders of Ephesus, when they met Paul at Miletus, had been forewarned by him in his touching address, of the grievous wolves that were ere long to assail that faithful fold. His anticipations had been too faithfully verified. With ravening fury they had descended; but though, in the simile of a greater than Paul, the wolf had come, it had failed to scatter the sheep. He whom they had taken as their Shepherd, whose cause and religion they had boldly espoused, had

noted their “labour” (their toiling, oppressive labour, as the word means); their “patience” under threat, and persecution, and violence; their intolerance alike of doctrinal defection and inconsistent conduct—“Thou canst not bear them which are evil;” their rigid and impartial discipline, exercised in the case of all false teachers and false brethren who were privily bringing in damnable heresies, which, under the semblance of human wisdom, were undermining the foundations of the faith; amid scorn, and obloquy, and worldly loss, with martyr-heroism and martyr-patience, firmly enduring all for His name’s sake. What a noble eulogy! What more could be said on His part? What more can be lacking on theirs? It almost seems as if the supreme Judge of all had in a miniature judicatory forestalled the great Judgment-scene, and pronounced His unqualified “Well done” on good and faithful service.

And yet this prolonged encomium—this full catalogue of well-earned praise, is followed with a “*nevertheless*”—“Nevertheless I have against thee” (‘somewhat’ is not in the original) “because thou hast left thy first love.” The first ardour of their early love had cooled. It was only a few brief years since Paul’s Epistle was sent, but its phraseology would need to be sadly altered and modified now. Their Lord’s saying on Mount Olivet had a mournful fulfilment regarding their collective body, whatever might be the individual exceptions—“The love of many shall wax cold.” He speaks of them as “fallen”—fallen from a high eminence;—like once-soaring eagles,

now with wings collapsed struggling in the dust, their noble plumage soiled and ruffled—their glory gone !

Does not this righteous upbraiding come home in solemn, searching truthfulness to many churches, many congregations, many hearts ? Where is the fire and fervour and devotion of a first love ? Is God's word by His old prophet a bygone memory—"I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals ?" Has the love of the world, or the love of sin,—has neglect of prayer and of the means of grace, dulled and deadened spiritual life—so that there are no kindlings of soul as once there were at the mention of the name and the love of Jesus ? Has a mechanical, formal orthodoxy taken the place of the life of faith and the life of devotion ? What is to be done ? Is the dull torpor, the mournful deterioration to be perpetuated ? Is the lamp to be suffered to flicker and dim away in the darkness without an effort to resuscitate the flame ? No ! the Lord's fidelity in rebuke is only to prepare the way for a gracious remonstrance—"Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works." However great or ignominious the fall, it is never too late to rise and redeem the neglected past. "Turn ye, turn ye," He seems to say, "that ye die not." And turn ye—not by rekindling a mere fitful glow of ardent emotion, but by doing "the first works"—the true tests and exponents of a genuine revival of that love which has suffered so sad a decay. The opportunity, however, may be short. If the season of grace and repentance be suffered to pass unimproved—"I will come unto thee

quickly, and will remove thy candlestick (or lamp) out of his place.”* The one glimmering, unfaithful candle is only taking up room in the temple-court, which another would better supply. It is like the barren fig-tree of the parable, drinking in to its worthless stem and branches the summer rains and dews and sunshine which would have nurtured abundant fruit in others. In either case, the defaulter must be removed, for needlessly occupying temple-space or cumbering productive ground.

Oh! it is a solemn thought, alike regarding churches and individuals, that it is only by reason of the Lord’s marvellous patience and tolerance they are preserved. The hour of mercy is on the wing. “Except thou repent” trembles on the lips of the infinitely forbearing ONE. His Spirit will not always strive. If His patience be tampered with and abused—if a church, instead of going from strength to strength, degenerates from weakness to weakness—the long-deferred sentence must go forth. How fared it with Ephesus? Alas! she knew not the time of her visitation. The grievous wolves completed the havoc of the fold—the waning love gradually lessened—the once-bright candle was quenched in darkness. And where is the queenly city and her loyal, God-loving church now? The place that once knew them knows them no more:—the pen of desola-

* A reference, supposed by some, to the removal to Rome, shortly before, of the seven-branched candlestick of the Jewish Temple,—an act of sacrilege which, as is well known, is still commemorated in sculpture on the Arch of Titus in the Roman capital.

tion has written on every fragment of her mouldering ruins, “I will remove thy candlestick out of his place.”

The Divine Saviour, after recurring once more to a redeeming feature in the case and character of the Ephesian Christians—their determined stand against the licentious creed and practice of the Nicolaitanes or Baalamites—concludes with the first of the beautiful cluster of figurative promises—“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” In wrath He remembers mercy. Judgment is His strange work. He who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, and who stays His rough wind in the day of His east wind, ever mingleth reproof with kindness. He willeth not the death of the sinner, but rather that he would turn from his wickedness and live. In that apostate Church there were doubtless a few still faithful—still glowing with the old fervour of pristine love—a few olive berries still on the top of the wintry boughs. It is to such He addresses the closing promise;—to those who would hold fast their faith and patience to the end, He would give to eat of the tree of life in the celestial Paradise. In the earliest chapters of Bible story, we have a glimpse of that Tree of life within the earthly Eden; but its gates close and the mysterious object vanishes from our sight. But a fairer Eden and Paradise is revealed above, where sin dare not enter, where no cherubic sword guards the way. *There*, is this Tree with its perennial fruits, wafting immortal fragrance and distilling immortal balm—the symbol and

emblem and guarantee to the glorified of the perpetuity of their bliss.

It is worthy of notice—as showing the connection between these Epistles to the seven Churches and the second (and in some respects distinct) part of the Book of Revelation—that the figurative promises of the one have a remarkable correspondence in the other. Indeed, these figurative sayings in the seven Epistles have their amplest fulfilment and interpretation in the subsequent glowing visions of the millennial state and heavenly glory. As an old commentator says—“The first thing promised in the seven Epistles is the last and highest in the fulfilment.”* In the closing gorgeous vision of the water of life—“on either side of the river was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” Whatever was forfeited in the Fall will be more than compensated in Redemption. “Behold,” says He who sitteth on the throne, “I will make all things new!”†

And what is the great practical lesson, on a review of this searching and solemn letter? Is it not to prompt the question—How stands it with us as churches? How stands it with us as individuals? Have we forgotten the vows of our early heart-dedication? Are the symptoms of decay and declension too painfully visible amongst us? Is the spiritual death-chill upon us? Has the cable been cut which anchored us to the living Rock,

* Bengel.

† See a full statement of this correspondence in Elliot, p. 81.

and are we drifting farther and farther out to the great sea of darkness? Again we ask—What is to be done? Is it to be abandonment—despair? No! Let us return and “do the first works” ere we become castaways for ever. Let us search out the peculiar sins which have entailed the terrible departure and quenched the first love,—whether it be worldliness, or pride, or sensuality—or, like these Nicolaitanes, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness—a vaunting profession with an inconsistent or immoral life,—whatever has enfeebled the moral courage, and left a miserable, heartless outward form as all the remains of the once-loving soul and devoted purpose. “To him that overcometh:” the Divine Head—Himself the mightiest of conquerors—reminds His people of toil and struggle as the condition of victory. Nor let us fritter the solemn individual application away, as if the reference had no bearing on ourselves, and was restricted to that martyr age—to amphitheatres and arenas of blood—to Domitian’s dungeons and Nero’s lions. The conflict, though imperceptible, is often to the spiritual nature deadliest in a time of peace,—when there is nothing to rouse from the slumber of self-security and supineness,—when we are apt, by base worldly concessions and sinful compliances and self-indulgences, by arrogance and pride, by grasping covetousness and portentous forms of cupidity, by lax doctrines and immoral life, to deny and dishonour the name and cause of our Great Master. By those who prefer (for there is a contrast intended) eating the enervating fruits from the tree of guilty pleasure, there will be

gathered none of the fruits of the tree of life in the midst of the Paradise of God. That tree is the reward of conquest, and toil, and self-sacrifice to the fighting Christian,—not to the coward and selfish children of Ephraim, who, though *appearing* in soldier-mien, “carrying bows,” have turned faint in the day of battle. On the other hand, nobly fighting and striving, the fruit of the tree (Christ’s grace and strength) will be imparted even now, to give nourishment, and vigour, and needful support in all time of our tribulation.

But as it is to churches in their collective capacity to which the Divine Redeemer here specially speaks, neither let us lose the solemn distinctive lesson by dwindling it down in an application to individuals alone. As surely as Ephesus—the home of apostles and martyrs, with her bright sisterhood of Christian cities, was weighed in the balance and found wanting, and has been swept with the besom of destruction—so surely will Britain be dealt with if she suffer herself to be a traitor to the most gigantic spiritual trust ever bequeathed to a great people. All churches are on their trial. Well for us if we get guiding-light from these beacons of the past,—if we timeously hearken to the monitory word. The Great Head who moves in the midst of His candlesticks will never be without a Church. He will never be denuded of faithful witnesses to His name and cause. His Churches may be transferred—but they can never, like the candle of the wicked, be put out. The place of the faithless will be supplied by the faithful. If we refuse to shine for Him, others

will ;—if these should hold their peace, the stones will cry out. Christ indeed may not—and from His utterances in these Epistles will not—be unmindful of a Church's good deeds in the past. Her historic recollections, her struggles, her martyrdoms, are engraven on the palms of His hands ;—the kindness of her youth, the love of her espousals. But neither let us trust to the possession of mere ancestral fame and prestige. It will not save us when we cease to fulfil our mission, and become guiltily oblivious of those great truths and great principles for which our fathers suffered. “ *Remember* from whence thou hast fallen ! ” Remember ! It is a word of rebuke ; but it is a word of quickening and revival also. It is designed by Him to recall to us, as to Ephesus, these grand traditions of holier and better times. It is the sharp blast of a trumpet to stir within us the memories of the departed—calling upon us to rekindle the torch dropped from their hands, and which is now, we fear, smouldering amid error of doctrine and laxity of life. “ *Remember* therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works.” Be this our reply, in the might of Him who walks amid the candlesticks, “ *Quicken us, and we will call upon Thy name.* ” “ *Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts : cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved !* ”



VL

The Epistle to the Church of Smyrna.

“AND UNTO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA WRITE; THESE THINGS SAITH THE FIRST AND THE LAST, WHICH WAS DEAD, AND IS ALIVE; I KNOW THY WORKS, AND TRIBULATION, AND POVERTY (BUT THOU ART RICH), AND I KNOW THE BLASPHEMY OF THEM WHICH SAY THEY ARE JEWS, AND ARE NOT, BUT ARE THE SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN. FEAR NONE OF THOSE THINGS WHICH THOU SHALT SUFFER: BEHOLD, THE DEVIL SHALL CAST SOME OF YOU INTO PRISON, THAT YE MAY BE TRIED; AND YE SHALL HAVE TRIBULATION TEN DAYS: BE THOU FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH, AND I WILL GIVE THEE A CROWN OF LIFE. HE THAT HATH AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAITH UNTO THE CHURCHES; HE THAT OVERCOMETH SHALL NOT BE HURT OF THE SECOND DEATH.”—REV. II. 8-11.

THE EPISTLE TO THE CHURCH OF SMYRNA.

A DISTANCE of forty miles separates EPHESUS from SMYRNA. The modern traveller finds himself journeying between these two sacred cities of the Apocalypse, not as in ancient and apostolic days, by means of horse, or camel, or caravan, but by our own familiar steam, the only railway that has as yet invaded the desolation of a country so rich in resources of soil, climate, scenery, and imperishable historic interest.

If we found the city of Ephesus specially associated with St John, Smyrna is equally identified with another name of undying celebrity in the Church of Christ. Sailing along the magnificent bay (the finest in the Archipelago), at the head of which the city with its 120,000 inhabitants is situated, the eye discerns on one of the crested heights, amid a cluster of tall cypresses, the white wall which encircles the reputed tomb of POLYCARP. This whole Epistle "to the Angel of the Church in Smyrna" has a new pathos and signification added to it, if we connect it with this honoured member of the noble army of martyrs. A careful reader will at once observe that it stands out pre-eminently from the others—as "the Martyr's Epistle." Its text is suffering and trial. Nothing could possibly be more appropriate than its "comfortable words," on the supposition that

the Angel or chief minister to whom these were addressed, was none other than he, who, we know from the earliest annals of the Christian Church, was an illustrious sufferer for the Gospel's sake, and was enabled so manfully to endure his fiery baptism.

There is what may almost be called a romance of sacred interest about the whole history of this saintly Father; "the blessed Polycarp," as the ancient Church, for successive centuries, seems distinctively to have named him. He had lived to a venerable age, far beyond even the allotted fourscore. In the prime of his youth he had become (and that too by no formal profession, but by ardent attachment) a loving disciple of the Lord Jesus. Thenceforward, he himself tells us, for many a long year he served Him with an unswerving and unfaltering devotion. There was much in the outer circumstances of his life to deepen and stimulate the ardour of this holy love. He was the disciple of John—standing to John very much in the relation of Timothy to Paul—"his dear son in the faith." Irenæus, who lived a generation later, touchingly tells how he himself in early boyhood had been honoured and privileged with the personal friendship of Polycarp,—how he was wont to hear from his lips what had been told him by John, of Immanuel's person, and converse, and earthly ministry.* We can picture the scene; the aged Apostle of Bethsaida—one of the inner circle of loved Disciples, and the most loved of the inner circle,—he who of all the honoured twelve had drunk deepest of his Lord's spirit, and had the

* Eusebius, v. 20.

nearest place at his Lord's side—how would he delight, in the mellowed evening of his days at Ephesus, to recall that matchless fellowship! How fondly would he confide every hallowed memory, as it rose before his mental eye like a dream of heaven, into the ear of the trusted friend at his side!—their walks on the lake-shore of Gennesaret—their confidential intercourse at early morn or dewy eve on their way from Galilee to the pilgrim-feasts—their silent meditations as they wandered at sunset across the heights of Olivet—or during the last and most solemn closing scenes, at the Supper-table—the Garden—the Cross—the Resurrection morning—the forty days;—in short, the “many other things which Jesus did” he so touchingly speaks of in the last verses of his Gospel, and which, though he had the heart, he had no room to record. Think of him thus making the beloved and like-minded Polycarp the depository of this unwritten Evangel. Need we wonder that the love of the disciple and saint for his great Lord grew and intensified under such teaching, and that, with a transport of emotion, he could utter the words as his own—“Whom having not seen, we love: in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory”?*

After a life of noble consistency, the hour of trial—the testing hour of suffering arrived. It was under the reign of the Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius Verus. The storm was first roused by the malignant enmity of

* Tertullian and Irenæus distinctly inform us that Polycarp was set over the Church of Smyrna by St John.

the Jews, who found no difficulty in enlisting and stimulating the passions of the heathen mob. Not ingloriously to evade the hour of persecution, but obedient to the intercessions of his flock, who naturally wished to save for themselves a life of such priceless value—Polycarp took refuge in the adjoining mountains to await there the subsidence of the storm; spending his anxious hours, along with a few others, in wrestling at the mercy-seat—not for his own suffering Church alone, but for the whole suffering children of God scattered abroad.* It seemed like a Mount of Transfiguration, where angels and the Lord of Angels strengthened him for the decease which, like a Greater Sufferer, he was about to accomplish. The cup, however, as in the case of the Prince of Martyrs, was not to pass, and he accepted it without a murmur. The secret of his place of concealment was divulged; but the tread of his frenzied persecutors at the door was heard with no words but those of uncomplaining submission. On his way to Smyrna, the Irenarch met him, and inviting him into his chariot, sought in vain to shake his constancy. He offered release on condition of retractation. "What hurt," said he, "I pray thee, shall come thereof, if thou say 'My Lord Cæsar,' and do sacrifice, and thus save thyself?" Once more, on reaching the amphitheatre,

* Full details, of which the present is an outline, will be found in the remarkable and most interesting ancient "Epistle of the Church of Smyrna," written by the faithful of that Church to the brethren of Pontus, and preserved by Eusebius, B. iv. ch. 15. See "Fox's Book of Martyrs," Jacobson's "Apostolic Fathers," and a full translation in "Milner's Church History," ch. v. p. 76.

the Proconsul gave him the option of having his hands unbound by consenting to curse his Saviour. "Be good to thyself," said the presiding magistrate, "and favour thine old age: take thine oath, and I will discharge thee. Defy Christ." The Christian hero boldly replied, in the memorable testimony, "Eighty and six years have I been His servant, yet in all that time hath He not so much as once hurt me: how then may I speak evil of my King and Sovereign Lord, who hath thus preserved me?" The judge rose from his seat, and tried to overawe him with the threat, "I have wild beasts to which I will throw thee." "Let them come," was Polycarp's reply; "I have determined that I will not turn from the better way to the worse." "Then," said the incensed Proconsul, "I will tame thee with fire." "You threaten me," returned Polycarp, "with fire, which shall burn for the space of an hour and shall then be extinguished: but thou knowest not the fire of the judgment to come, and of everlasting punishment reserved for the wicked and ungodly. Give me what death ye list." His silvery hairs made their silent appeal in vain to his murderers. "To the lion!" was the cry which rose from a hundred voices, alike Jewish and Pagan; and it was only because the beast of prey was already glutted, that they had to resort to the equally terrible alternative of a slow death by burning. The pile was ready. With calm deliberation he stripped off his upper garments and undid his girdle—making no remonstrance save regarding the iron hoops with which they sought to make him fast to the stake. Such appliances he told

them were needless, as his heroic steadfastness proved. To quote the quaint and touching words of the original narrative, " Being bound as a ram out of a great flock for an offering, and prepared to be a burnt-sacrifice acceptable unto God, he looked up to Heaven and said"—(truly no nobler leaf is there out of the grand liturgy of dying martyrs)—" O Lord God Almighty, the Father of thy well-beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, by whom we have attained the knowledge of Thee, the God of Angels, and powers, and every creature, and of the whole race of just men which live before Thee ; I give Thee hearty thanks that Thou hast vouchsafed to bring me to this day and this hour, that I may have my part among the number of Thy martyrs in the cup of Thy Christ, unto the resurrection of eternal life, both of body and soul, through the operation of Thy Holy Spirit; among whom may I be received this day before Thee as an acceptable sacrifice, as Thou hast before ordained. For which, and for all things else, I praise Thee, I bless Thee, with the eternal and heavenly Jesus Christ, Thy beloved Son : to whom, with Thee and the Holy Ghost, be glory both now and to all succeeding ages. Amen." Owing to untoward causes, he had to submit to lengthened suffering. The sword completed what the fire had left undone ; and when all was over, the gang of hating Jews, who had been the first to collect the wood for the pile, instigated their heathen accomplices to refuse delivering up the charred remains to the Christians and accord them decent burial. In the words of the old Smyrnæn

Epistle, which furnishes these particulars, “ By his patience he overcame the unrighteous ruler, and received the crown of Immortality.”

What a light does this touching tale throw upon the older inspired Epistle, when we bear in mind that all this tragedy of martyrdom, in which other Smyrna Christians besides Polycarp were involved, must have been vividly portrayed to the omniscient eye of Him who indited, as if by anticipation, the needful message of warning and comfort! What balm-words for the martyred disciples to carry with them to their scenes of torture, and to which they might cling when the growl of the hungry lions was in their ear, or the fuel was collecting in the *agora*! What was that comfort? “These things saith the First and the Last, *which was dead and is alive*”—(lit., “Who became dead and lived again”). Heart-stirring theme of consolation!—that He who in His Divine nature was from everlasting to everlasting, had, in His lowly suffering humanity, as the Incarnate Redeemer, Himself passed through the terrors of death,—and that these terrors, as in the case of His true people, were only the passage and entrance into endless life. What could disarm that amphitheatre and these blazing faggots of their horrors, if this could not?

Then the Almighty Speaker proceeds to a more detailed cognizance of their trials. “ I know thy works and tribulation” (outward persecution) “ and poverty” (the spoiling of your worldly goods, which, being a feeble band compared to your adversaries, you are unable to resist)—“ but thou art rich.” Hostile Jews and mocking

heathens and venial Roman officials may “ oppress you, and draw you before the judgment-seats and blaspheme that worthy name by which you are called;”—you may be poor in this world, but you are rich in faith, rich in heavenly treasure. You may be looked upon with cold supercilious disdain as the filth and off-scouring of all; but very different is the estimate of the mocking undiscerning world from that of Him who seeth not as man seeth. I know the world-verdict—“ Thy poverty; ” but here is Mine—“ Thou art rich.” Beneath the outward tattered garment patent only to the world’s eye, there is a “ clothing of wrought gold.”

After forewarning of the blasphemous hate of the Jews—those who arrogated to themselves the sacred name and prerogative of God’s Israel, but who proved themselves to be rather “ the Synagogue of Satan ”—He reveals the unseen leader and instigator of all this foul and persistent enmity. He is styled here in the Greek *Diabolos*—*i.e.*, accuser or calumniator. “ Behold the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried.” Some may affect to discard belief in the literal personality and power of Satan, resolving these into myth and symbolism—mere allegorical representations (like Bunyan’s *Apollyon*), of the force of human depravity and moral evil. But the story of the Church’s martyrdoms tells a different tale. As Christ seemed often to afford precious discoveries of His own glorious presence to the faithful in the hour of their sufferings, so did Antichrist the great counterworker (with characteristic malignity, and malice, heading his legions of darkness),

come into fierce conflict with the powers of light in these stern battlefields of torture and endurance. In both cases —invisible indeed, yet not the less truthful—did Michael and his angels fight against the Devil and his angels. John would, moreover, be prepared by a reference to Satan's power in this opening Epistle, to acknowledge and estimate his activity and influence in the subsequent visions,—playing his own terrible part in the nations' future drama as the gigantic propagator of evil—“the god of this world”—“the Prince of the power of the air”—“making war with the saints.” In the present case, the trial, though sharp, is to be brief—“Ye shall have tribulation ten days.* But the Great Captain of salvation exhorts—“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer.” In the might of Him—the First and the Last—who, once dying, now liveth for evermore—they are to be made more than conquerors: Greater is He that is with them than he that is in the world. And even should a cruel and violent death impend, they can regard it only as a glorious passage to endless life; they can mount their fiery chariot, and as they are borne upwards in the flames, can sing, “Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

He ends with the encouraging and appropriate exhortation and promise to the Angel, in the prospect of what Irenæus calls “that glorious and splendid martyr-

* The persecution of the Church of Smyrna closed, for the time being, with Polycarp's martyrdom.

dom"—“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

Very beautiful is this closing promise, whatever figurative meaning and acceptation we may give it. At first sight we may recognise a new and impressive recurrence to the simile which St Paul once and again employs in his Epistles with reference to the Grecian foot-race—the runners pressing on to the goal, straining every nerve in the exciting contest—and the crown, the laurel wreath, awaiting the victor at the end of the stadium, ready to be bound around his brows. More than one commentator, however—and we think on good ground—dissent from this interpretation. There is a harmony and uniqueness of design in the Apocalypse, as in all the other parts of Sacred Writ; and a nice and careful investigation will show, that though the Book itself be full from first to last of emblems, none of these are taken from the customs of the heathen. While the Apostle of the Gentiles never scruples to take a Pagan custom or rite to enforce a sacred lesson, the imagery of the Apocalypse is altogether Jewish, or rather is composed exclusively of sacred symbols, from the Temple candlesticks onwards. And if, as one discriminating writer remarks,* the palm-bearing multitude in a subsequent vision seems at first sight to refute this theory (with its reference to the symbol of Greek or Roman triumph), it is strictly speaking no real exception, as a much more natural and beautiful meaning is its allusion to the palm branches of the Hosanna-day—

* Archbishop Trench *in loco.*

used by the multitudes at the great Jewish festival, the Feast of Tabernacles—the eternal commemoration, not so much of *victory*, as of *rest* in the true land of Canaan.

The crown of life, therefore, here spoken of, would seem rather to indicate a royal crown—"a badge of royal dignity"**—Peter's crown of glory—Paul's crown of righteousness—the crown given to God's king and priest—the crown especially bestowed on the enduring martyr, as in that same record of Polycarp's death already referred to it is said, "he was crowned with the crown of martyrdom." † Yes! we repeat this is emphatically the martyr's epistle;—the flame—the prison—the torture—the sword—are traced through it all. We in this peaceful age, when the faggot is quenched, and the dungeon is closed, and the sword sheathed, cannot enter into its especial comforts. But let us, as we close it, feel as if we had been treading sacred ground—tracing words of hallowed consolation which ten thousand trembling hearts have read in their hour of darkness and horror;—words which have breathed many a blessed requiem while the tortured flesh was still palpitating and the soul struggling to be free; which have revealed to the sufferers in the hour of death, amid a canopy of smoke and flame, the white-robed angel—ay, the Lord of Angels—holding out to view an unfading diadem.

And what seems its great lesson to us? if not this, **LOYALTY TO CHRIST.** The Church of Smyrna had no such

* Hengstenberg.

† Trench notes that the word *στέφανος* here used "is that by which all the Evangelists designate the crown of thorns, evidently a caricature of royalty which was planted on the Saviour's brows" (p. 112).

roll of varied commendation as that which we found recorded concerning the Church of Ephesus. But neither is there in her case the "*nevertheless*" which qualifies the former, and demands from the lips of the All-Seeing a "*Repent ye.*" Though nothing, however, specially and distinctly commendatory is said, she is spoken of by implication as "*faithful*":—suffering and willing to suffer, for her divine Master's sake, poverty, imprisonment, death. For this, the glorious gift and reward of life is hers—the life purchased by her risen Head—a part and portion of His own resurrection-life—“*Because I live ye shall live also.*”

Are we faithful stewards to our trust, whatever that trust may be? Are we faithful to our work, whatever that work may be? Even though we may be painfully conscious of our want of success—seeing at times our weapons shivered in our hands,—the best and noblest efforts and struggles of life—efforts for God and for Christ apparently a failure,—the fire burning our work—the tide washing our breakwaters away? Never fear! It is *fidelity*, not *success*, God looks to. The last great words of the Great Day will be these—“*Well done,*” (not good and successful, but) “*good and faithful servant.*” What we have alone to fear is, what is here unfolded in the closing utterance of all—“*the second death;*”—that death which is the fearful inheritance of the ‘unfaithful’—“*the faithless and the unbelieving;*”—that death which has too its transition into life—but it is a life in which the raised and revivified body is married to the lost soul! A fearful thought truly to the sinner, but

bringing no terror to the saint; for “he that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death;” “on such the second death hath no power.”

Let us be up and doing our appointed task; for soon the allotted term of working will be past, followed by the hour of reckoning and recompense. Death will not come, as in Polycarp’s case, with the flame and the sword—but rather most probably with noiseless step and gentle whisper. But that solemn moment we have *so often* thought of and *so little* thought of,—that moment when the last grain in the sandglass shall run out—come it must—sooner than we dream of. And the great question is, How shall we meet it? Shall it be with the martyr’s prayer and the consciousness of fidelity? or with the inward shudder of those who are standing on the brink of an undone Eternity? God save us from such an alternative! Be it ours now to make a heart and life surrender of ourselves to that great Conqueror, who has plucked the sting alike from the first and the second death. Relying on the strength of Him who ‘was dead, and is alive, and liveth for evermore,’ let us feel assured that victory will at last crown our steadfast and loyal allegiance to His cause; and that we shall be able, in some lowly measure, to appropriate that beautiful comment on this whole Smyrna Epistle contained in the words of St James—“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love Him!”

VII.

Epistle to the Church of Laodicea.

“AND UNTO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH OF THE LAODICEANS WRITE ; THESE THINGS SAITH THE AMEN, THE FAITHFUL AND TRUE WITNESS, THE BEGINNING OF THE CREATION OF GOD ; . . . BECAUSE THOU SAYEST, I AM RICH, AND INCREASED WITH GOODS, AND HAVE NEED OF NOTHING ; AND KNOWEST NOT THAT THOU ART WRETCHED, AND MISERABLE, AND POOR, AND BLIND, AND NAKED : I COUNSEL THEE TO BUY OF ME GOLD TRIED IN THE FIRE, THAT THOU MAYEST BE RICH ; AND WHITE RAIMENT, THAT THOU MAYEST BE CLOTHED, AND THAT THE SHAME OF THY NAKEDNESS DO NOT APPEAR ; AND ANOINT THINE EYES WITH EYE-SALVE, THAT THOU MAYEST SEE. AS MANY AS I LOVE, I REBUKE AND CHASTEN : BE ZEALOUS THEREFORE, AND REPENT. BEHOLD, I STAND AT THE DOOR AND KNOCK.”—REV. III. 14, 17-20.

EPISTLE TO THE CHURCH OF LAODICEA.

LAODICEA was a noted city in South Phrygia, nigh to Colosse, and six miles from Hierapolis. The illustrious Roman, Cicero, mentions it in his letters as the seat of his own proconsular dignity. It was an emporium of trade, distinguished especially for woollen manufactures of rare texture—fabrics woven from the hair of the sheep and goats which browsed in vast flocks on the pasturages around ; also for those ointments and cosmetics so prized by Orientals, and which still afford no inconsiderable traffic in the cities of the Levant. Being, moreover, on the high road of commerce between Ephesus and the East, it had gathered within its walls a goodly number of merchant-princes. Its gold was well known to the traders, who with their caravans passed through its streets. Although shorn of much of its outward magnificence in the year A.D. 62, owing to the devastations of an earthquake, yet, as a test of its opulence, the havoc thus made was repaired by the citizens alone, unaided by any imperial grant. Now a miserable village, there are yet remains, in the shape of broken columns and ruined aqueducts, to attest its former luxurious splendour.

These characteristics may be mentioned, because some of them at least, as will presently be seen, throw light

on the peculiar symbolism and figure employed in the Epistle. A Church had been planted there in Apostolic days. Paul, thirty years previously, refers in his Epistle to the adjoining Church of Colosse, to “the great conflict he had for them of Laodicea” (Col. ii. 1). However successful that hard fight may have been in the days of the Hero-Apostle, his death would seem to have turned the tide of battle: the simplicity of the ‘truth as it is in Jesus’ succumbed before the spirit of evil, which had its outward manifestation in worldliness, pride, and lukewarmness.

The figurative language of the latter portion of the letter (to which we shall in this chapter confine ourselves) seems appropriately borrowed from the merchant city. Its material gold and silver and gay clothing—its woollen mantles, silk trappings, and abundant traffic—are taken as the symbols of boastful self-sufficiency and complacent self-righteousness,—masking and concealing its own utter beggary and nakedness in the sight of God. The Great Redeemer, the inditer of the Epistle, represents Himself as a travelling merchantman, the head of one of these Eastern caravans, coming laden with true riches and heavenly vestures, divine unguents and perfumes, to supply the place of the spurious and the counterfeit. He personates such a merchantman going from house to house and from door to door with His own priceless goods—those spiritual verities which no material wealth can purchase. Standing in front of each dwelling, He proclaims in the ear of its inmates, however unwilling to hear—“Thou sayest, I am rich, and in-

creased with goods" (or 'I have enriched myself'), "and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable" (or rather, 'the wretched one and the miserable one'), "and poor, and blind, and naked." And then, having uttered the solemn protest and warning, He calls on His retainers with their hoarded bales to draw near. He opens up these His own costly wares,—the gold without alloy, which no Ophir mine could produce,—the glistering white vesture of His own righteousness, which no loom on earth could weave,—salves and aromatic oils for true spiritual vision,—unguents for the head, which no earthly laboratory could furnish. These Laodiceans were living in guilty self-deception. They were clad in meretricious clothing. They were imagining themselves to be in king's houses while they were bankrupts,—their whole life and being was a lie. "Open your doors," says the Great Vender of spiritual riches—"transact with *Me*." "I counsel thee to buy of *Me* gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see."

The summons however seems to be in vain. The earnest importunate voice is, by these self-satisfied and self-contented Laodiceans, disowned and neglected. On, however, He pursues His way from street to street and from house to house, repeating the warning and the gracious offer, until the shadows of evening begin to fall. The hours of His sojourn are numbered. To-morrow,

this wayfaring Man, who has turned aside to tarry for a night, must depart. By early morn the camels must be re-loaded, the tents outside must be struck, and He must journey onwards to offer the rejected treasures to other cities. But He will not leave—He will not abandon His blessed purpose of love, without one other effort at the doors of those who had in their folly spurned Him away. Though needing rest Himself, He is busied from sunset until midnight-hour in re-traversing the now silent streets, and thus exclaiming, as He stands in front of every dwelling, “BEHOLD, I STAND AT THE DOOR AND KNOCK.” Alas! for Laodicea. These pleadings were disregarded. Let the historian Gibbon record, in his own few words, the tale of her desolation—“The circus and three stately theatres of Laodicea are now peopled with wolves and foxes.” Christ had knocked at her dwellings, but He had knocked in vain.

Separating these latter words of the Epistle from their special reference to the Laodicean Church, and giving them a universal, or rather a spiritual and personal application, let us dwell for a little on this amazing picture. The rejected yet loving Saviour—the Divine Merchant-man from the Heavenly City, a suppliant at the door of the sinner’s heart.

The two brief words in this brief clause are each of them suggestive:—“Behold I STAND”—“Behold I KNOCK.”

1. The attitude of *standing* suggests His CONDESCENSION. If condescension be a relative term, and increases

in proportion to the distance and disparity between him who exercises it and those who are its objects, where can there be condescension similar to this?

There are noble instances of condescension and kindness in the annals of earth. We have read of those of lofty rank, who, at the promptings of philanthropy, have gone down into the dens of misery and vice, to relieve suffering and mitigate wretchedness. Tales still linger in the memories of nations, of disguised sovereigns entering the hovel of distress—hands that grasped the rod of empire drying the orphan's tears, soothing the infirmities of age, or the pangs of sorrow. We can ascend a step higher still in the graduating scale of being. We can leave the crowns and monarchs of earth, and imagine one of those bright Seraphs who hymn their songs in the upper Sanctuary coming down to our world on some behest of mercy, hovering around the straw-pallet of some Lazarus-beggar, stooping to smooth his death-pillow, before bearing the spirit to Abraham's bosom. But what even is *this*?—these angels bathing their wings of light in the floods of infinite glory before the throne—what is this stoop of theirs, in comparison with that marvellous tale of Him who announces Himself in the opening of this Epistle as “the Amen—the faithful and true Witness—the beginning of the creation of God”—whose throne is of old from everlasting—the blaze of worlds the jewels of His crown;—who has reared every arch and pillar in Nature's temple—making its bells to ring an eternal chime to His glory? Yes! Behold Him who hath

kindled up the altar-fires of Heaven, who calleth every star by name, and from whose boundless empire this tiny earth of ours would be no more missed, than the fall of the leaf in the forest or the bursting of the bubble on the ocean—to whom the universe is but as the small dust of the balance, all time but as the beat of a pulse or the swing of a pendulum—behold Him, the mighty uncreated Lord, the all-glorious Redeemer—“of whom are all things, and by whom are all things”—behold Him “as one that serveth;”—His head bared to the pitiless storm, a petitioner at the door of a human heart!

2. This attitude suggests further, the thought of **FOR-BEARANCE** and **IMPORTUNITY**. “Behold I stand!”—‘I have been standing long,’ He seems to say, ‘and I am standing still: and though My head is wet with dew and My locks with the drops of the night, I am unrepulsed by a life of ingratitude;—how can I give thee up?’ If He had been the very kindest of human benefactors, His patience would have been long ago exhausted, His pleadings silenced, His remonstrances closed. But “hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary.” His loving appeals are like the billows which, century after century, lashed into fury, have been beating on the rock-bound coast. They make no way. They strike, but return, chafed and buffeted and baffled, to their ocean-bed, to gather up new strength for a fresh assault. Emblem of the rocky heart. The ocean of a Saviour’s love has been knocking and surging against it, for days and weeks and

months and years. Yet, though beaten back by that adamant stone, it returns with new force to the charge. Wondrous thought,—the importunity of Christ with sinners! What patience! Think of the myriads of hearts He has thus been pleading with for 6000 years! Think of the different ages and dispensations! Think of the different climes and tongues! Who would have imagined aught else but that these stern refusals would have driven Him for ever away to other hearts and homes that would give a holier and kinder welcome? *But, "Behold, I stand!"*

Let us pass now to inquire into the import of the second term here used—“Behold, I knock.”

Christ knocks at the door of the heart in various ways.

1. He knocks by His *Word*. It is the rod of His power. “Is not my Word as a hammer,” says He, “that breaketh the rock in pieces?” His preached Word has ever been made by Him mighty to the pulling down of strongholds. It would be a poor matter indeed for a mortal man, in his own strength, with stammering tongue and feeble arm, to try and plead with sinners, and wrench the bolts from the doors of their hearts. But, “the wisdom of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” It matters not by whom the warriors’ bugle-note is sounded which musters the host for the charge. It matters not in the day of battle by whom our own pibroch, ‘savage and shrill,’ is sounded. It stirs the bosoms of the brave.

It may be piped by coward and unworthy lips: but the old, familiar, heart-stirring strain sends the flush to the cheek and the flash to the eye, and puts nerve and sinew into the most prostrate arm. The great Gospel-trumpet, by whomsoever blown, is the trumpet of God. It sounds forth the words of God; and, as such, they shall not return to Him void. Many a poor, faint, coward-heart, in the hour of spiritual battle, hearing these, out of weakness has been made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens. But see that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. Remember, every resisted knocking will wofully diminish the chances of opening. If first convictions are suffered to die away, the world's oblivion-power does its work. The next Sabbath returns,—its impressions are feebler. The heart, from very familiarity, becomes gradually more callous, uninfluenced, unimpressed—lapsing into awful unconsciousness to the perils and prospects of eternity. And *then*, how sad! when these knockings of Christ fall, like the gushing tears of the bereaved, as they sob their tale of unresponded-to anguish in “the dull, cold ear of Death!”

2. Christ knocks by *sickness*. A bed of languishing is spread. A man is called to renounce bodily strength and prosperity for an unexpected pillow of pain. Christ had often and again knocked at his heart while busied in the world; but the hum of an engrossing industry—the fever of gain and money-making—suffered not the voice to be heard. He had given him the talent of health;—but he had been a traitor to his trust, for no atom of

time had been consecrated to the soul and eternity. He takes him aside and lays him on a couch of disease. In the quiet of that lonely chamber, the world's carking cares and siren voice now hushed and overborne, Jesus speaks! Ay, and oft He speaks there loudly too. The man is hurried, without a note of warning, to the borders of the grave. The dim lamp of life flickers in its socket. It was but last week he was in the Exchange or in the market. It was but last week he was following his plough, or digging his garden, or standing by his counter, or plying his vigorous hand in his workshop. And *this week*, he reads in the physician's countenance, and in the choking sobs and ill-suppressed tears around his bed, that eternity is nigh at hand. How loudly does Christ then knock! How loudly does He speak—"Prepare to meet thy God!" While the answer is breathed out in trembling agony—'Lord, I cannot meet thee as I am!—a few more days—a few more weeks! Oh, spare me, that I may recover strength before I go hence and be no more!' Has He thus been speaking to any of us? Are we the living monuments of His sparing mercy? Has He heard our prayer?—has He arrested the axe, and revoked the sentence—'cut it down?' Let not His voice die away like the retiring thunder. Be it ours to say—"I will pay Thee my vows which my mouth hath spoken and my lips have uttered while I was in trouble!" "The living—the living, even he shall praise Thee, as I do this day!"

3. Once more, Christ knocks by *bereavement and death*. This is the loudest knock of all. The lion is said to

make the forest echo loudest in a storm of thunder. With reverence be it said, He who is "the Lion of the tribe of Judah," and who is spoken of in this Book as uttering voices "as when a lion roareth," yes! Jesus speaks and knocks loudest in the season of affliction—in the lowering, thundery, storm-wreathed sky. Some beloved object of earthly affection is taken away. The world is a wilderness to the stripped and desolate heart; embittered are all its joys, poisoned its sweetest fountains. Who is there but can tell of such knockings as these? when, seated in the chamber of dissolution, you saw some cherished spirit taking its flight, leaving you to weep unavailing tears and to breathe unavailing prayers,—hoping against hope that it might be some wild and feverish dream which the morrow would dispel? The morrow comes, but with it the waking thoughts of agony,—*Jesus knocks!* In the silence of that death-chamber, when seated with emotions too deep for utterance, *Jesus knocks!* Or when standing at the grave's mouth and committing loved dust to its kindred dust;—in the awful stillness and solemnity of that scene, *Jesus knocks!* And when, returning home to the rifled and deserted dwelling, the vacant seat is marked, the absent guest is missed, the joyous voice or innocent prattle, familiar at every turn, its music gone, and gone for the for ever of time,—and the deep, settled silence of desertion all that is left in exchange—*Jesus knocks!*—*Jesus speaks!* And what does He say? Poor trifler! who didst prefer thy clay idols to Myself; admitting them within

thy heart, and keeping Me standing without,—I have seen it meet to dash one after another to the ground, that thou mayest be driven from the perishable to the eternal.

We cannot, however, enlarge. Time would fail to tell of the many ways by which Jesus knocks. He knocks by prosperity. He can knock through the blessings with which He loads us, as well as through those He takes away. He knocks in all the vicissitudes of life. He knocks by great events, and by trifling occurrences. It may be, the return of some mournful anniversary; or the notice of a death in the obituary; or the passage of a funeral in the street; or the reading of a simple tract; or the well-timed observation or admonition of a friend. Jesus knocks! But who can tell how long? At the present hour He may be making His last appeal—a final remonstrance. For oh! though importunate—slow to abandon—reluctant to give up—there *is* a point beyond which even His forbearance cannot go. And *THEN*—*What then?* The dread mark is affixed on the doomed and fated doorway, and the awful word is uttered—“Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone.” “How often would I have gathered you, and ye would not?”

But the tread of His footstep is still heard. His angels are still hovering around, waiting to carry tidings to Heaven of His Spirit’s knocking and hearts yielding. Surely this picture of the Laodicean Church tells, as few other scriptures do, that no door, however long closed, can be hopelessly shut—that no heart, however obdurate, can be beyond the reach of grace and mercy. To those

of whom He spake in the opening of the Epistle, as 'lukewarm,' and of whom He uttered the strong language that, as such, He would reject them with loathing out of His mouth as a nauseous thing,—not only is it at their doors He stands pleading, but to them, if they hearken, He gives the highest, the crowning and culminating promise of all. Accepting the 'gold'—the riches of His grace and salvation—the 'white raiment'—the glistering robe of His imputed and imparted righteousness, He will make them sharers and partakers, and that too in its most exalted aspects, of His heavenly bliss—“I will grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne.” Let us give to Him the throne of our hearts, that He may thus at last give to us the throne of His glory. Even now, as the Saviour's voice is heard, in the majesty of omnipotence, let there be the willing response—“*Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without?*”



VIII.

The Opened Door: and Creation-Song.

“AFTER THIS I LOOKED, AND, BEHOLD, A DOOR WAS OPENED IN HEAVEN: AND THE FIRST VOICE WHICH I HEARD WAS AS IT WERE OF A TRUMPET TALKING WITH ME; WHICH SAID, COME UP HITHER, AND I WILL SHOW THEE THINGS WHICH MUST BE HEREAFTER. AND IMMEDIATELY I WAS IN THE SPIRIT: AND, BEHOLD, A THRONE WAS SET IN HEAVEN, AND ONE SAT ON THE THRONE. AND HE THAT SAT WAS TO LOOK UPON LIKE A JASPER AND A SARDINE STONE: AND THERE WAS A RAINBOW ROUND ABOUT THE THRONE, IN SIGHT LIKE UNTO AN EMERALD. AND ROUND ABOUT THE THRONE WERE FOUR AND TWENTY SEATS: AND UPON THE SEATS I SAW FOUR AND TWENTY ELDERS SITTING, CLOTHED IN WHITE RAIMENT; AND THEY HAD ON THEIR HEADS CROWNS OF GOLD. AND OUT OF THE THRONE PROCEEDED LIGHTNINGS AND THUNDERINGS AND VOICES: AND THERE WERE SEVEN LAMPS OF FIRE BURNING BEFORE THE THRONE, WHICH ARE THE SEVEN SPIRITS OF GOD. AND BEFORE THE THRONE THERE WAS A SEA OF GLASS LIKE UNTO CRYSTAL: AND IN THE MIDST OF THE THRONE, AND ROUND ABOUT THE THRONE, WERE FOUR BEASTS FULL OF EYES BEFORE AND BEHIND. AND THE FIRST BEAST WAS LIKE A LION, AND THE SECOND BEAST LIKE A CALF, AND THE THIRD BEAST HAD A FACE AS A MAN, AND THE FOURTH BEAST WAS LIKE A FLYING EAGLE. AND THE FOUR BEASTS HAD EACH OF THEM SIX WINGS ABOUT HIM; AND THEY WERE FULL OF EYES WITHIN: AND THEY REST NOT DAY AND NIGHT, SAYING, HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, LORD GOD ALMIGHTY, WHICH WAS, AND IS, AND IS TO COME. AND WHEN THOSE BEASTS GIVE GLORY, AND HONOUR, AND THANKS TO HIM THAT SAT ON THE THRONE, WHO LIVETH FOR EVER AND EVER, THE FOUR AND TWENTY ELDERS FALL DOWN BEFORE HIM THAT SAT ON THE THRONE, AND WORSHIP HIM THAT LIVETH FOR EVER AND EVER, AND CAST THEIR CROWNS BEFORE THE THRONE, SAYING, THOU ART WORTHY, O LORD, TO RECEIVE GLORY, AND HONOUR, AND POWER: FOR THOU HAST CREATED ALL THINGS, AND FOR THY PLEASURE THEY ARE AND WERE CREATED.—REV. IV.

THE OPENED DOOR: AND CREATION-SONG.

ONE may well shrink from the risk of dimming, by the employment of any human words, the grandeur of such a passage as this. It is a passage which brings us not only to the threshold of Heaven, but opens a vista into Heaven itself.

We also now enter on an entirely new portion of the Apocalypse. It was the golden candlesticks with the Son of Man walking in their midst, and the messages to the seven representative Asiatic Churches, which hitherto engaged the attention of the Seer of Patmos. He is now to pass within the Palace gates into the presence-chamber of the King. The "former trumpet-voice" summons him to higher manifestations.* It is, moreover, the *Future*—the future of the Church militant and then the glories of the Church triumphant—which are henceforth to engage his thoughts : "Come up hither and I will show thee the things which must be *hereafter*." That 'hereafter' is to occupy the whole sequel of the Book. The present chapter and the one following (the latter must form the theme of separate consideration) present to us in glowing colouring the scenery of Heaven. They give, as it has been appropriately called, the local

* The words in v. 1 are not the ambiguous expression in our translation, "the first voice which I heard," but "the voice I formerly heard."

description of the celestial council-chamber: also the words of the threefold song which thrills on the lips of its glorified inhabitants. It is the first of this triple theme of praise which we mainly listen to in this vision.

As we might well imagine, when the privileged Disciple gets his initial glance into that Heaven of Heavens, it is the august Throne of Deity, the focus and centre of all, which arrests his gaze. And combining the description of the chapter with others which follow, this grandest of visions—truly a Revelation of Revelations—consists in the manifestation of God as *the God of Redemption*. It is the FATHER (His redemption-name, in His paternal covenant relation to His people) who is seated on the Throne. The second Person in the adorable Trinity is subsequently represented under the name and form of a LAMB—the emblem of His mediatorial character and work. The seven lamps of Fire (flaming torches or flambeaux), burning before the throne (like ‘the seven spirits of God’ of the opening chapter), form the appropriate symbol of the HOLY GHOST in the plenitude of His gifts to His Church, enlightening, purifying, refining;—“the Spirit of judgment and the Spirit of burning.” The Throne itself was like a jasper and a sardine stone, the emblems alike of purity and justice; for the jasper, whatever it was, is spoken of in a later chapter as being “clear as crystal.” While encircling all, was the Rainbow of emerald—the refreshing memorial of the covenant of grace—tempering the awe which must have been felt by the emission, ever and anon,

from "out of the throne" of the old Sinai symbols of judgment, "lightnings and thunderings and voices." "Green (emerald)," says the best of the old commentators, "is of all colours the most agreeable; . . . and when God represents himself as the jasper and sardine, He exhibits Himself in His holiness and glory; . . . but the green rainbow is a mark of the Divine condescension, placability, and forbearance. . . . We are not able to fix our eyes on the Divine majesty and holiness: they frighten us away; but the friendliness of God allures us and inspires us with an assured confidence." *

Such were the leading features in the vision. But there were, besides, other imposing and significant accessories. There was before the Throne "a glassy sea like unto crystal." A needful space thus intervened between these great and glorious figurations and the person of the spectator; while the Sea of glass itself suggested the calm majestic repose of the Heavenly Temple, in contrast with the discords and disharmonies of the earthly.† Strange and marvellous, too, were other forms in immediate proximity with the throne. "Round about the throne were four and twenty seats" (or lesser thrones), upon which four and twenty elders were sitting in the symbols of priesthood and royalty, of endurance and victory, clothed in white raiment, and having on their heads crowns of gold. These assessors were doubtless representative

* Bengel.

† Lightfoot considers there is an allusion to the Molten Sea in Solomon's Temple.

beings—the representatives of a double twelve—the twelve Patriarchs or tribes of Israel under the old, and the twelve Apostles of the new dispensation;—those same who are subsequently heard blending their voices in the twofold song descriptive of both economies—“The Song of Moses the servant of God and the Song of the Lamb.”

Nor is this all. “In the midst of the throne—(perhaps, rather “in front of the throne”), and round about the throne—were four Beasts”—or as that may be far more appropriately rendered—“four Living Creatures,* full of eyes before and behind,” and which assumed the fourfold similitude of a lion, a young ox, the face of a man, and an eagle. These six-winged beings were also doubtless representative; and though other figurative meanings, as we shall see, may be attached to them, they were intended, in the first instance, to symbolise, not as in the case of the four and twenty elders, the later and more glorious results of Redemption, but all the Creatures of God, or rather, Creation itself, animate and inanimate. They are the embodiment of creature perfection, creation-life;—Strength, Patience, Intellect, Activity;—and as such they have their assigned place and mission to celebrate the glory of the Great Supreme. Their unresting song, struck by the key-note of the Book, is this, “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty,

* Dr Wordsworth notes, that in addition to this translation being the more accurate, “it obviates the confusion which, by the use of the word *Beasts*, might arise between these heavenly personations, and the mystical Beasts (*θηρία*), which are *opposed* to the Lamb. Whereas the *Lamb* is here in the *midst* of these *Living Creatures*, and they adore Him.”

which was, and is, and *is to come*" (or "WHO COMETH"). But they sing not that song alone;—it is an antiphonal strain. Their ascription is immediately followed by a repeater from the twenty-four elders, who take their blood-bought crowns and cast them before the throne—disowning, by the expressive act, all claim of merit or righteousness.

It is specially, however, to be noted, that this their opening song, is not a Redemption-anthem; it is not even the anthem of Providence:—both of these are reserved. It is the earlier—the anterior ascription which had been sung of old by the morning stars at Creation's birth—"And when those living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to Him that sat on the throne, who liveth to the ages of the ages,"* the four and twenty elders fall down before Him that sat on the throne, and worship Him that liveth unto the ages of the ages, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord" (or, as it is in some MSS., "*Our Lord*"—our God in covenant—differing thus from the song of the creatures †), "to receive glory" (or rather) "*the* glory, and the honour and the power" (which these Thy representative creatures have rendered Thee), "for Thou hast" (not redeemed, but) "*created* all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created."

This rapid and superficial outline of the vision itself will be better filled in and supplemented, as we endea-

* See Tischendorf's translation.

† See Alford *in loco*.

vour to ascertain its practical bearing on the case of the Apostle of Patmos and on ourselves.

(1.) As to the special meaning and lessons it conveyed to John. In this vision, the truths and symbols regarding the Church on earth which were set before him in the first chapter, were, if it may be so expressed, authenticated and countersigned in Heaven. It was shown to him that they formed as glorious a reality in the upper, as in the lower Sanctuary. A Jew, and familiar with the writings of the Prophets, he could hardly fail, as he now gazed within that opened door, to call to mind two similar pictorial revelations, unfolded at an earlier era to Seers of kindred spirit and temperament with himself.* The first of these was that remarkable vision vouchsafed to the Prophet Isaiah when just entering on his great career. He stood, as he himself tells us, under the portico of the holy Temple of Jerusalem. All at once gates and inner veil seemed mysteriously uplifted or withdrawn, and he was permitted to gaze far within, on those awful recesses, which even no prophet was permitted to enter—the very Holy of Holies itself. There he saw the Jehovah of Israel seated on a throne “high and lifted up,” His train filling the Temple. The two bright-winged seraphim as a royal guard stood on either side. Each had six incandescent wings: with two of these the head was covered, in token of reverence;—with two the feet, in token partly of imperfection, partly of humility;—two

* Nearly all commentators have referred to this similarity, and drawn from the comparison their own meaning and lessons. See especially, although differing in interpretation, Maurice on Revelation, *in loco*.

were outstretched as if ready for flight, in token of willing obedience. It was a seasonable Apocalypse to the untried and misgiving youthful messenger, at a time when the horizon was black with storm and disaster. The Assyrian was about to make his nest in the cedars of Lebanon, ready to whoop down on the doomed and defenceless kingdom of Judah. And more depressing to the fervid spirit of the young Prophet was the inveterate obstinacy of the hearts he had been called to quicken. Was his mission to be surrendered in despair? Will he use his prophetic foresight only to proclaim "*Ichabod*" in the midst of a guilty people and a hopeless cause; and perhaps abandon his own faith in the God of his fathers? Is the cruel demi-god who sat enthroned in the palaces of Nineveh, henceforth to rule the earth without a rival? A glimpse within that temple told him the reassuring truth. There was there a Living Being mightier than Pekah, or Rab-Shakeh, or Sennacherib, whose name was "*The King, the Lord of Hosts*," surrounded with ministering spirits swift of wing in his service and reverentially waiting His commands. And even although, at the very time, he was told that the cities were to be "wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without men, and the land to be utterly desolate"—yet the Lord being in His holy place, the children of Zion might well be joyful in their King. The earth would never be without its Ruler—Judah would never be without its God. In the blinding splendours of that temple-vision, he could exclaim in trembling transport, "Mine eyes have seen the King!" What though earthly

hosts should be let loose on the people and the land he loved, his ears had just heard glorious Creatures chanting the song—(and so loud and fervid was the ascription, that post and pillar and cedar-gate shook to their foundations)—“Holy, Holy, Holy! the whole earth is full of His glory.” It is enough: he is nerved for more than half a century of toil and heroic endurance;—“The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble: He sitteth between the cherubims; let the earth be moved. The Lord is great in Zion; and He is high above all the people. Let them praise Thy great and terrible name; for it is *Holy*.”

The other kindred vision, which could not fail to be familiar to John, was the still sublimer one vouchsafed in a later age to the Prophet Ezekiel. That mourning exile was located, with many of his expatriated countrymen, on the banks of the river Chebar. The land of their fathers is lying desolate—the city sitting solitary that was full of people. A whirlwind seemed to come from the far north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, chariot-like—in motion;—a series of mighty wheels of strange complexity intersecting one another, were turned by means of four living creatures. “As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side: they four had also the face of an eagle.” While high over all was “the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone; and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it.” This likeness of the glory of the Lord was moreover encircled with “the appearance

of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain" (Ezek. chap. i). Ezekiel, like Isaiah, was filled at this time with saddest anticipations. All around, in the land in which he was a stranger, he beheld the visible symbols of gigantic regal power, boundless ambition, savage cruelty. He listened to the crushing story of human tyranny and wrong. But the vision on the Chebar revealed, in his case too, a mightier than the mightiest of human kings and tyrants;—wheels higher than these chariot-wheels of Assyria—wheels apparently involved and in confusion—‘wheel within wheel;’ but all, when understood, moving in sublime harmony. Glorious beings of might too were impelling them, putting their shoulders to their gigantic circles; while above all, was a lustrous throne of sapphire purity and righteousness; and on that throne—not as in the marble sculptures on which the Prophet’s eye must often have gazed, the gigantic embodiment of brute force—but “the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it”—with the bright emblem of grace and love—the encircling rainbow. What did these picturings reveal to the lonely exile? What did they tell him? But to bide his time;—to fear neither the might of Babylon nor Assyria; for there was a great Being enthroned over and above the wheel-like complications and confusions of the lower world, and directing them all. Himself holy and omnipotent, with the pavement of “the terrible crystal” beneath His feet, He had also a host of glorified creatures doing His pleasure, who would yet vindicate His ways in the restoration of His people,

and in the evolution of good to His Church and to mankind.

John, the later of the three Jewish Seers, needed a similar assurance in times of similar darkness and impending woe. He had, indeed, as we have previously seen, already received the guarantee of the Church's safety — beholding his Lord walking amid the candlesticks, with the two-edged sword in His mouth, and holding the stars in His hand. But these same soul-comforting truths, viewed from the earthly stand-point, are now further confirmed by this glimpse into the heaven of heavens. Gazing within that opened door, he too has his apprehensions allayed. He also—like the two ancestral Prophets—beholds in vision a glorious PERSON, a personal God, a personal King; not as the earlier Seer did, enveloped in whirlwind and cloud—but seated on a throne of jasper and sardine in a blaze of light—with the clear pavement of rock-crystal before Him reflecting His own glorious image, and angelic ministries waiting upon Him eager to do His pleasure; while the well-known Rainbow, the Bow of God, spanning the firmament—the Bow which succeeded the deluge on the earth—was again seen, the blessed pledge of peace and love! John knew that the world was on the eve of great events; that even the apparently immutable throne of the Caesars would soon rock to its foundation. But what of that? There was one seated on the Throne he now beheld in that disclosed Heaven, who “liveth for the ages of the ages”—a King above all human kings, a power that would outlive all human dynasties and empires.

“The Lord God Almighty” was the name by which He was adored by these living Beings. All else might change—He was unchangeable. Whatever tribulations may be appointed, the Apostle and the Church will patiently endure, because they are ordained by *Him*. The complicated wheels of Ezekiel are again to revolve: but their revolutions he can now calmly and trustfully contemplate. With the simple faith of the little child in the dark Temple of Shiloh, as further truths are to be unfolded to him, he can say—“Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.”

But though these were the special lessons of the time for John, there are comforting lessons of another and more general kind, for us also. We must not think of this vision as one, so to speak, extemporised for a particular occasion—in other words, that it is the representation of an exceptional scene in Heaven, introductory to the subsequent unfoldings of the Book. It is a glimpse or symbol of what Heaven is now, and what Heaven will be to all of us who enter within the gates into the city; its peerless element of glory and bliss consisting in the full vision of God—God in His covenant aspect, as the God of Salvation—His throne encompassed with the emerald rainbow.

Interesting is it to contemplate the diverse multitude of worshippers who surround Him—the Redeemed from the earth, as well as the other hosts of created intelligences. The Redeemed are here represented in their twofold character of “kings and priests;” as

kings, wearing golden crowns—as priests, wearing white raiment; while the other worshippers, who appear under the fourfold similitude, are described as “full of eyes” (or “teeming with eyes”), and moreover, that “they rest not day nor night.” From this we may infer their wakeful vigilance,—their unceasing, untiring employment in the heavenly ministry; the fourfold symbol further indicating, it may be, different occupations, different subjects for the enlistment of their immortal energies, but all conspiring to promote the glory of the one great Object of adoration and love.

We are further reminded, as we listen to the august voice in the vision, that all events in the world’s history and our own are planned—appointed. “Come, said that voice, and I will show thee things which *must* be hereafter.” That word *must* is a precious one, considering who utters it. The Divine Being seems to say of, and to every actor in the subsequent chapters, as He did to Cyrus of old, “I girded thee, though thou hast not known me.” The programme of coming events is in His hands. That Heaven where He reigns supreme is a world of order. In the calm blue of these serene ethereal heights, there are no more rolling clouds or moral hurricanes—no more darkness and gloominess. Justice and Judgment are the habitation of His throne: Mercy and Truth go before His face.

We may further, from this vision, draw the inference how deep is the sympathy between the members of the Church triumphant and the Church militant. These twenty-four elders—the representatives of the Redeemed

from the earth—form part of the assessors of the enthroned King, and are present during the future evolution of the great drama. How cheering and elevating the thought that even now, amid our struggles and trials, “the great ones of the olden time”—the glorified dead—are interesting themselves in us; sympathising with us in our sorrows, desiring our welfare—waiting, it may be, to give us welcome home!

And more solemn than all;—how near this other world is—or may be. “Heaven is in no far distant star”—no “land that is very far off.” There is but a narrow curtain separating from the true inner sanctuary. A door is opened, and Heaven is there! Death seals our bodily senses, as a temporary trance did John’s, and we are ushered in a moment (in the twinkling of an eye) before “God the Judge of all, and the spirits of just men made perfect.” Oh! are we ready? Whether it be in the lonely Patmos of a long sick-bed;—or fresh from the marts of busy life;—or like Isaiah, at the threshold of the Temple;—or like Ezekiel, in the Chebar of a distant land;—are we ready for John’s summons, “Come up hither?” Are we ready to meet the four and twenty elders? Are we ready to put on the white robe and the golden crown? Are we ready to take up the holy song? Are we ready to meet the Holy God?

IX.

The Seven-Sealed Roll and the New Song.

“AND I SAW IN THE RIGHT HAND OF HIM THAT SAT ON THE THRONE A BOOK WRITTEN WITHIN AND ON THE BACKSIDE, SEALED WITH SEVEN SEALS. AND I SAW A STRONG ANGEL PROCLAIMING WITH A LOUD VOICE, WHO IS WORTHY TO OPEN THE BOOK, AND TO LOOSE THE SEALS THEREOF? AND NO MAN IN HEAVEN, NOR IN EARTH, NEITHER UNDER THE EARTH, WAS ABLE TO OPEN THE BOOK, NEITHER TO LOOK THEREON. AND I WEPT MUCH, BECAUSE NO MAN WAS FOUND WORTHY TO OPEN AND TO READ THE BOOK, NEITHER TO LOOK THEREON. AND ONE OF THE ELDERS SAITH UNTO ME, WEEP NOT: BEHOLD, THE LION OF THE TRIBE OF JUDA, THE ROOT OF DAVID, HATH PREVAILED TO OPEN THE BOOK, AND TO LOOSE THE SEVEN SEALS THEREOF. AND I BEHELD, AND, LO, IN THE MIDST OF THE THRONE AND OF THE FOUR BEASTS, AND IN THE MIDST OF THE ELDERS, STOOD A LAMB AS IT HAD BEEN SLAIN, HAVING SEVEN HORMS AND SEVEN EYES, WHICH ARE THE SEVEN SPIRITS OF GOD SENT FORTH INTO ALL THE EARTH. AND HE CAME AND TOOK THE BOOK OUT OF THE RIGHT HAND OF HIM THAT SAT UPON THE THRONE. AND WHEN HE HAD TAKEN THE BOOK, THE FOUR BEASTS AND FOUR AND TWENTY ELDERS FELL DOWN BEFORE THE LAMB, HAVING EVERY ONE OF THEM HARPS, AND GOLDEN VIALS FULL OF ODOURS, WHICH ARE THE PRAYERS OF SAINTS. AND THEY SUNG A NEW SONG, SAYING, THOU ART WORTHY TO TAKE THE BOOK, AND TO OPEN THE SEALS THEREOF: FOR THOU WAST SLAIN, AND HAST REDEEMED US TO GOD BY THY BLOOD, OUT OF EVERY KINDRED, AND TONGUE, AND PEOPLE, AND NATION; AND HAST MADE US UNTO OUR GOD KINGS AND PRIESTS; AND WE SHALL REIGN ON THE EARTH.”—REV. v. 1-10.

THE SEVEN-SEALED ROLL AND THE NEW SONG.

THE CREATION-SONG of the preceding chapter is now to be blended with grander anthems,—THE SONG OF PROVIDENCE and THE SONG OF GRACE. These are evoked by new objects or figurations in the sublime Heavenly Vision.

The Almighty Father seated on the throne of jasper and sardine, has, lying on His open right hand* a Roll, similar to what was used by the Prophets in recording their divine utterances. It was *the Roll of Providence*,—the symbolic Volume of the Divine counsels, containing the prophetic history of the Church, and the destinies of the nations to the end of time. This roll was “written within and without”—that is, not only on the upper side which met the Holder’s eye as it was unwound from its cylinder; but on the back also it was filled with lettering. There were no blanks in it,—no vacant spaces that would admit of new entries. This crowding of the writing indicated exhaustive fulness. It was, moreover, “sealed (lit. “sealed down”) with seven seals;”—again the mystic memorial symbol of completeness, betokening, in another way, that it formed an all-comprehensive record and register of the will and ways of the Supreme,

* Not “*in*,” as in our translation.—See *Alford and Bishop Wordsworth on the expression ἐπὶ τὴν δέξιὰν.*

its contents reaching onwards through the world's six work-days to the great seventh—the Sabbath of eternity. The sealing further implied that its contents were sacredly locked and concealed from public gaze ; and yet, lying on the open palm of the hand indicated also that there was no unwillingness on the part of the enthroned One to divulge its contents, if any worthy to undertake the task could be found.

“A strong angel” appeals to his fellows. He asks if there be no potent arm that can wield its strength in breaking open these seals and revealing the hidden mysteries ? He proclaims with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the roll and to loose the seals thereof ?” There is silence in Heaven. Amid the adoring ranks around, no one responds to the summons. None in the heights of glory,—none on the platform of earth,—none “under the earth (*i.e.*, in the deeps of Hades—the region of departed spirits) were able to open the roll, neither to look thereon.” The awe-struck and wondering Seer “weeps” at the confessed failure. He had received the invitation and assurance, on the first opening of the heavenly door, “Come hither, and *I will shew thee* things which must be hereafter.” Is He, whose name was “Faithful and True,” to belie His own promise and to defraud His servant of his fond expectation ? John knew the priceless value of what that Book contained. Let only the seals be broken, the parchment unfolded, and a flood of light would be thrown on an enigmatical future ; many an anxious fear and foreboding would be stilled ; many a perplexity solved. Whether in dark char-

acters of mourning and woe, or in golden and silver lettering, he knew there would be a glorious revelation of Truth and Righteousness, and a sublime “ vindication of the ways of God to men.” What a boon would such a Revelation be to the Church in every coming age !

But when the proclamation of the herald Angel is unanswered—the secrets of the scroll likely to remain locked in impenetrable mystery, the tears of the lonely man on his lonely island begin to flow,—tears akin to those of Mary Magdalene when she stood by the blank sepulchre “ weeping ”—mourning over the apparent ruin and frustration of her fondest hopes. Touching episode this surely in the apocalyptic drama ! the Apostle, in his moment of glowing rapture at the very gate of Heaven, with a tear—(or rather a flood of tears, for he “ wept much ”)—furrowing his cheek, in the unfeigned sadness of baffled and disappointed expectations. It reminds us of yet another kindred weeper, whose hero-heart was proof against all cowardly or pusillanimous weakness, but who was similarly moved when he heard of those who were enemies to the cross of Christ. Paul was jealous for the Cross and the Sacrifice,—John for the Crown and Kingdom of their common Lord and Master. Both were at one in their unselfish interest for the advancement of His cause, the vindication of His name, the promotion of His glory. Yes ! it is indeed an impressive picture to see men who never wept for themselves weeping for that which was to them dearer than self—dearer than life. It lets us into the tender agony of great souls.

We have heard of patriots mourning for their Fatherland,—noble natures throbbing at the contemplation of iron-handed tyranny and cruel wrong,—men whose brave spirits would never permit them to wince or falter under the threat of torture or in the storm of battle, but who could only speak through tears and choked utterance in proclaiming their country's woes. Such too is the anguish of earnest Christian patriots;—such the tears shed by them over the misapprehension and misinterpretation of the Divine ways and counsels,—the rejection of the Divine offers of mercy through stern unbelief and defiant pride. Such ought to be the feelings and emotions of every true soldier of the cross as he sees thousands perishing around him;—the Gospel-trumpet sounding its warnings apparently in vain;—honest efforts apparently frustrated and baffled;—all a gigantic failure. We lately heard of one of the standard-bearers in the Missionary battlefield—a noble man and a true—weeping like a little child, because the work he had so near his heart seemed to be progressing so tardily—the little done, the much undone;—the colossal walls of heathendom frowning defiance on his puny endeavours, and he left to cry through his tears and prayers, “Lord, how long?” Would that there were more of a similar spirit! And such there would be, were the surpassing grandeur and importance of that work and its awful responsibilities realised as they ought. There is a saying of one of our old divines, that “the sins of men are enough to make devils triumph and angels weep.” If a tear can thus be said to befit the eye of an angel-spectator of earth's

depravity and corruption, what should it be in the case of those, who, partakers of the frailties and sins of humanity, are themselves called as God's witnesses and ambassadors to stand between the living and the dead ! It well becomes all Churches and all their members, from time to time, as it were at Heaven's opened door, thus to ponder the shortcomings of the past ;—opportunities of good neglected,—souls around still perishing,—God's name blasphemed,—Christ's cause dishonoured,—vice unrebuked,—infidelity rampant ; and yet Death—Judgment—Eternity—at hand. May God kindle some of the fervid spirit which dictated the impassioned agonising apostrophe of the Prophet of Judah—“ Oh, that mine head were as waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people ! ”

But to return. The aged Apostle's ‘much weeping’ is immediately changed into joy and triumph. One of the Elders—one of those forming the redeemed white-robed multitude—bids him dry his tears, for some Being had been found infinitely worthy “ to open the Book.” John was at this time the most illustrious believer in the Church on earth—a peer among his fellows. Few if any in Heaven had been so honoured as he ; yet an unknown member of the Church triumphant is now his instructor; showing that there are revelations of truth made to the glorified which are withheld from those who, as ministering priests in the lower sanctuary, are still compassed with infirmity : so that it may be said with regard even to the most advanced in knowledge and faith and

love among the latter, “ He that is least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he.”

But who is He who is thus discovered to be worthy ? When all Heaven is dumb, who is the favoured one found equal to the task ? It is “ *the Lion of the tribe of Judah.*” The Lion—the victorious symbol of the favoured and the royal tribe, of whom the dying Patriarch thus spake in his farewell benedictions : “ Judah is a Lion’s whelp : from the prey, my son, thou art gone up ; he stooped down, he couched as a Lion, and as an old Lion ; who shall rouse him up ? ” “ Weep not,” said the delegated Elder, “ Behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, hath prevailed to open the book and to loose the seven seals thereof.” It is Christ—He who was alike of the tribe of Judah and of the lineage of David, that is pronounced worthy to be the unfoldier of the hidden mysteries. But He is so by conquest. The word “ prevailed ” in our version does not bring out the great truth, that it is as the Divine Vanquisher of sin and death He has qualified Himself (so to speak) to be the exponent and interpreter of the Divine counsels.* “ It is,” says St Augustine, “ by reason of His humiliation as man, that Christ received the roll, and not by reason of His Godhead.” It is as the Mediator of His Church He has the right and prerogative to break the seals and unfold the contents.†

* The rendering ought rather to be, “ hath conquered, so as to open,” &c. “ Hath vvone ” (won).—*Rheims’ Version, 1582. English Hexapla.*

† It may be well here to explain in a sentence, the manner of breaking these seven seals. They are not, as some might suppose, seven contiguous fastenings, where the roll would be first unwound. But they occur in

John gazes upwards in joyful expectancy. But what sudden change has taken place in the mystic figurations? He turns his eye in the direction of the Throne, where the worshippers already described are bending before some One adorable object. That object was seen “standing in the midst of the Throne” (or rather perhaps “in front of the Throne”); and from this time onwards, occupies the most conspicuous place—the central point in the Heavenly Visions. The Apostle looks for the majesty of Judah’s Lion. He expects to see some Being of unutterable might. But—strange thing for Heaven!—the object of adoration is no longer symbolised by the Lion, but by a LAMB. The word used in the original is also remarkable. It is “a little Lamb:”—a word peculiar to the Apocalypse, occurring here alone in this diminutive form in the New Testament, with the single exception of its use in Christ’s charge to St Peter in the closing chapter of John’s Gospel, where he employs the same expression, “Feed my little lambs.”* More than this, the Lamb of the vision appears covered with wounds and blood-scars, as if recently killed in sacrifice: and the closing ascription of the heavenly throng is not “worthy is the Lion that has conquered”—but “worthy is the Lamb that was slain!” What is this but the Divine

succession in the act of unwinding. A portion of the roll is disclosed; then a seal is broken. A second portion is unfolded, then another seal is broken. And so on, in succession, until the whole chart is unrolled.—See *Jahn’s Antiq., and Wordsw. Com., in loc.*

* The word here used is *ἀρνίον*, not *ἀρνίν*. It is the latter, again, which St John employs in the opening chapter of his Gospel, when he records the memorable exclamation of the Baptist—“Behold the Lamb (*ἀρνίν*) of God!”

Redeemer proclaiming, in expressive similitude, alike the tenderness of His nature and the perpetual efficacy of His mediatorial sacrifice and work, in the midst of the Church purchased by His precious blood?

In conjunction, however, with these symbols of meekness and gentleness, humiliation and suffering, there are two others added of omnipotence and omniscience. That little Lamb had "seven horns" (horns—the inviolable emblem of kingly power) * and "seven eyes," which are interpreted as "the Seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth :"—the Holy Ghost, in the sevenfold symbol of perfection and manifold operation, sent forth according to Christ's own promise as His Glorifier and Testifier.†

All seems now ready for the longed-for disclosure. This glorious Being "came and took the book out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the Throne." The Apostle, we may imagine, is all eagerness to listen to the stupendous revelations of the future which are to be made on the breaking of the seals. But he must for a time at least suspend his anxiety until two grand

* "Behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly, . . . and it had ten horns; . . . and the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise," Daniel vii. 7, 24; also, Rev. xii. 3. "There will I make the horn of David to bud," Ps. cxxxii. 1. "In my name shall his horn be exalted," Ps. lxxxix. 24. "And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David," Luke i. 69, &c., &c.

† John xv. 26, xvi. 14: "As the seven burning lamps before the throne represented the Spirit of God immanent in the Godhead, so the seven eyes of the Lamb represent the same Spirit in his sevenfold perfection, plenteous, so to speak, from the Incarnate Redeemer."—*Alford, in loc.*

doxologies are sung,—two new and distinct ascriptions of praise welcoming the approach of the Lord of *Providence* and the Lord of *Grace*, who was thus alone found worthy. “When he had taken the roll, the four living Beings and the four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them *harps* and *golden vials*” (broad, shallow-shaped vessels) “full of odours, which are the prayers of Saints.” We have in these the twofold symbols of praise and prayer. The Harps, whether gold or silver, were for purposes of adoration, while the golden Vials were filled with the prayers of the Saints (or literally, of “the holy ones”) of earth. Beautiful picture! the prayers and cries from the sorrowing, suffering Church below, are received into these golden censers by “the ministering ones,” and placed, as we shall afterwards find, in the hands of the One only Intercessor, to be perfumed with the incense of His adorable merits. Meanwhile, the first part of the “new song” rises from the conjoined voices of these Saints and living Beings; “new,” because evoked by the sudden appearance in the midst of the Throne of the Unfolder of the roll, the august Expositor of the otherwise inscrutable counsels. The words sung are these—“Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God a kingdom—a priesthood;* and we reign on the earth.” “We reign on the earth;” not, as in our rendering, in the future

* Alexandrine MS.

tense, as if some glorious kingdom were in reversion,—but it is a present reign. Cheering, as it has been observed, must the utterance have been to the Apostle, that even that afflicted, despised, persecuted remnant called ‘the Church on earth,’ was recognised in Heaven as a reigning power—exercising dominion and lordship through its great Head ;—anticipatory of that period when, as King of kings and Lord of lords, He will put all things under His feet, and vindicate His claim to universal sovereignty as celebrated in the four-fold enumeration of “every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation !”

Such was the First song, or the first chorus of the “new song.” But it was sung by a comparatively limited number of representative voices. The vast myriads of unfallen angels—the aborigines of Heaven, if we may so call them—had taken no part in it. There is a pause; and then we listen to a strain sublimer still, which may be designated the Great Redemption anthem joined in by the entire heavenly host. We shall do no more than give its own grand words without comment. It is a mighty volume of praise, which sends its multiplying echoes out to the very circumference of being. Not now the few favoured representatives—but the countless multitudes of angels, principalities, and powers, in their endless concentric circles, have gathered to this great inauguration festival, to tender their lofty homage and adoration to the slain Lamb. We seem to realise for the first time the sublime meaning of the saying, “Inhabiting the praises of eternity ;” for the wide vault and circuit of heaven, the

vast corridors of limitless space and time, are crowded with ministering spirits, and have become vocal with song. This is their doxology, “And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the living beings, and the elders: and the number of them was myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive (the) power, and (the) riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.’ And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, ‘Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.’” Such is the ascription. It has waxed louder and louder like the noise of many thunderings; the waves of sound have extended themselves in ever grander and increasing cadence till they reach the outskirts of being. Then gradually receding, they seem to rock themselves to rest; and the terminating strain is given by those who struck at first its key note—“And the four living ones said **AMEN.**” Then all is silence. The four and twenty Elders prostrate themselves in mute adoration, and worship Him that liveth for the ages and the ages!

There are many thoughts, alike of grandeur and comfort, which crowd upon us on a review of this vision. We must be content with alluding to the two leading consolatory ones.

The first embodies the same truth we met with in the

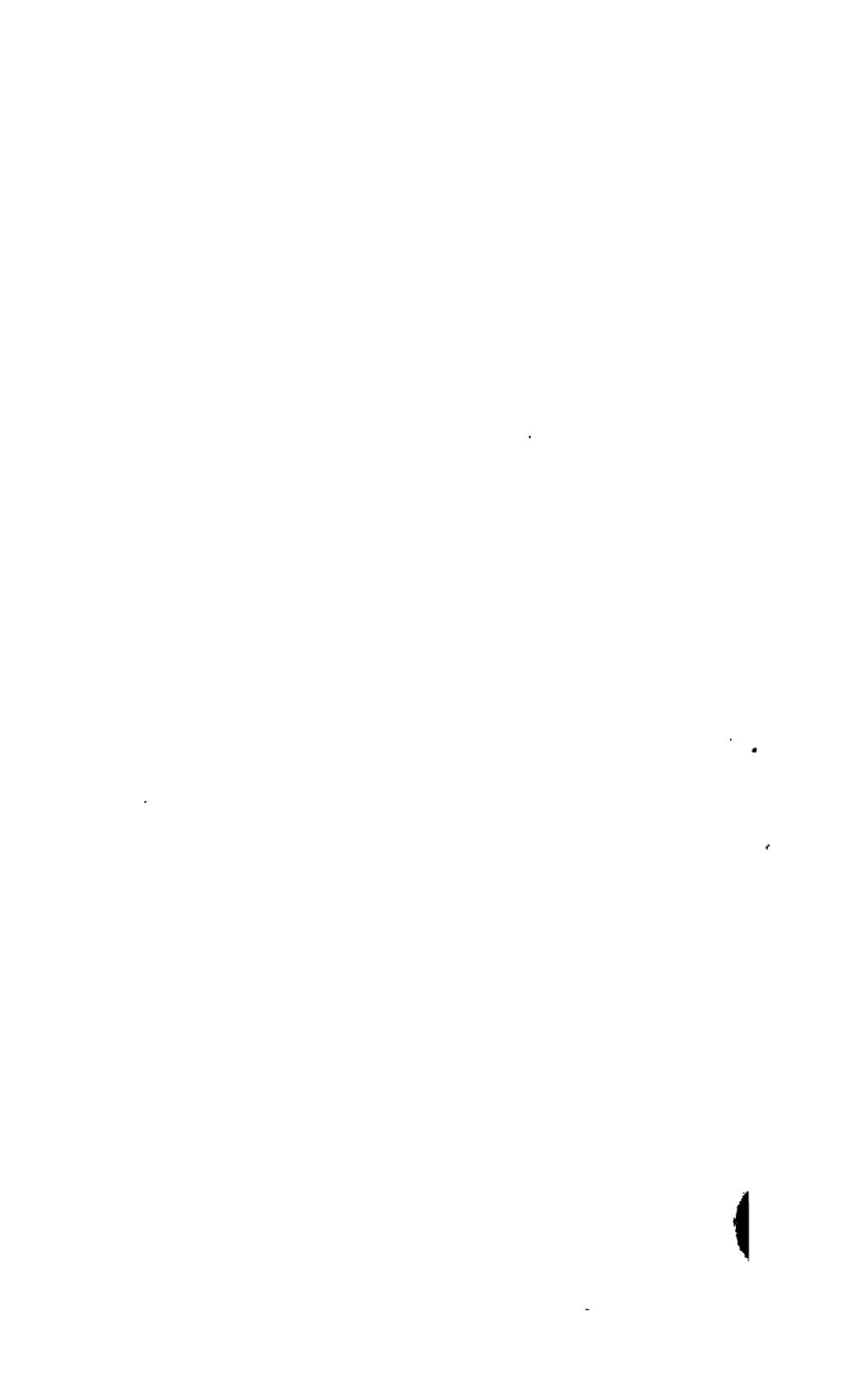
preceding chapter, but which is more fully developed here—that *the roll of Providence is in the hands of Jesus*. There are times, in the history of the world, we spoke of in connection with the former vision, when, amid political complexities—the prevalence and triumph of human tyranny and wrong,—still more, times in our individual experiences, in the mysteries of daily life—amid startling providences—baffling dispensations, the old moorings threaten to give way, or have momentarily given way, and we feel ourselves drifting out on the cheerless sea of human doubt and distrust,—when all is dark around, no rift in the cloud—no star in the midnight sky,—and in the anguish of bitter unbelief we are tempted to mutter the querulous plaint—“Where is now my God?” Or, if that God lives and reigns, does He live a God of terror? does He answer to the fire-god of the Phoenician in his Baal-worship, or to the Capitoline-Jupiter of the Roman, armed with the thunderbolt and forked lightning? or, in the phantasies of a later philosophy, has He abdicated His throne, and left man and his fortunes to wild chance, to be driven, things of fate, hither and thither on the fitful waters—the vessel without a pilot, the world without a ruler? No! the roll of Providence, containing the fortunes of the nations as well as all that concerns His Church and people, is in the keeping of the Christ of Calvary. “The Lord is King. . . . He sitteth between the Cherubims, be the earth never so unquiet.”—(*Prayer-Book Version.*) It is He who mingles every drop in the cup, and lights every furnace, and orders every trial, and draws every tear. Oh! what would many

have been in those hours of gloomy despair, when the props of existence were tottering underneath them—what they thought were life's strongholds giving way like the yielding ice beneath their feet—what would they have been, but for the sustaining assurance that that roll of human destiny is in the hand of the Lord who died for them !

We can now understand the reason of this strange, mingled symbolism—the appropriate figure of the Lion of the tribe of Judah in conjunction with a slain Lamb—that anomaly in Heaven—the memorials of pain and suffering in a place where sorrow never enters and suffering is unknown. Is it not to tell us of a blessed union of might and tenderness ; that we may confidently commit our everlasting destinies to Him ; for as the Lion of the tribe of Judah He is able to defend us—as the slain Lamb He is able to feel for us ? What more could we desire, than this combination of Omnipotence and Love—the greatness of Godhead and the sympathy of Humanity in the Person of the now Living One, who once was dead ? Let the seals be opened and the vials descend. We will trust in Him who alone is found worthy to open the book—add our “Amen” to that of the four living creatures, and with the Elders fall down and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever !

The second memorable thought or reflection here suggested is, that it *was the slain Lamb in the midst of the Throne, who summoned forth this loud anthem-peal.* It was sung by myriads of myriads ; and among those myriads, by the lips of unsinning Angels who had no personal

interest in His great atoning work. How much more surely ought that amazing oblation, thus symbolised, to evoke our loftiest praises and stir our deepest gratitude and devotion! Let us fondly grasp the magnificent truth in all its wondrous reality,—not diluting it to square and dovetail with modern theologies—not eliminating from it its grandest mysteries because they are mysteries; but rather content to receive them and rejoice in them as stupendous mysteries of love: “Christ crucified—the power of God.” While we delight to adore Him as the Lion of the tribe of Judah—while earth’s lowly “*Te Deum*” blends with the grander symphonies of the skies, “Thou art the King of glory, O Christ! Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father!”—let the ever-present recollection of His anguish, His bleeding love and atoning sacrifice, give deeper fervour and intensity to the prayer—“*O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, grant us thy peace!* *O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us!*” It is the cross of Christ, the everlasting love of God in ‘so’ loving the world, which will form the theme and problem of eternity. Angel-intellect from every corner of the universe of being, will stoop over the fathomless abyss and exclaim, “Oh, the depth!” Not to Elders alone, with their white raiment and redemption-crowns and golden vials full of odours—the representatives of the ransomed—but “to principalities and powers in heavenly places, will be made known by the Church” (through the glorified Person and adorable work of her living Head and King), “the manifold wisdom of God.”



X.

Opening of the first four Seals—
Creation's Cry.

“AND I SAW WHEN THE LAMB OPENED ONE OF THE SEALS ; AND I HEARD, AS IT WERE THE NOISE OF THUNDER, ONE OF THE FOUR BEASTS SAYING, COME AND SEE. AND I SAW, AND BEHOLD A WHITE HORSE: AND HE THAT SAT ON HIM HAD A BOW ; AND A CROWN WAS GIVEN UNTO HIM: AND HE WENT FORTH CONQUERING, AND TO CONQUER. AND WHEN HE HAD OPENED THE SECOND SEAL, I HEARD THE SECOND BEAST SAY, COME AND SEE. AND THERE WENT OUT ANOTHER HORSE THAT WAS RED : AND POWER WAS GIVEN TO HIM THAT SAT THEREON TO TAKE PEACE FROM THE EARTH, AND THAT THEY SHOULD KILL ONE ANOTHER : AND THERE WAS GIVEN UNTO HIM A GREAT SWORD. AND WHEN HE HAD OPENED THE THIRD SEAL, I HEARD THE THIRD BEAST SAY, COME AND SEE. AND I BEHELD, AND LO A BLACK HORSE: AND HE THAT SAT ON HIM HAD A PAIR OF BALANCES IN HIS HAND. AND I HEARD A VOICE IN THE MIDST OF THE FOUR BEASTS SAY, A MEASURE OF WHEAT FOR A PENNY, AND THREE MEASURES OF BARLEY FOR A PENNY ; AND SEE THOU HURT NOT THE OIL AND THE WINE. AND WHEN HE HAD OPENED THE FOURTH SEAL, I HEARD THE VOICE OF THE FOURTH BEAST SAY, COME AND SEE. AND I LOOKED, AND BEHOLD A PALE HORSE : AND HIS NAME THAT SAT ON HIM WAS DEATH, AND HELL FOLLOWED WITH HIM. AND POWER WAS GIVEN UNTO THEM OVER THE FOURTH PART OF THE EARTH, TO KILL WITH SWORD, AND WITH HUNGER, AND WITH DEATH, AND WITH THE BEASTS OF THE EARTH.”—REV. VI. 1-8.

OPENING OF THE FIRST FOUR SEALS— CREATION'S CRY.

THE strains of the threefold song having now died away, all is ready for the opening of the seven seals.

Upon the words "*Come and see,*" which are four times repeated in this new and magnificent series of visions, the most scholarly of modern commentators has the following note in his Greek Testament:—"The words '*and see,*' are omitted by two out of our three oldest MSS., the Alexandrine and the Paris, and by many others. The Sinaitic, and the later Vatican and others have them, but in different words from the commonly-received text, which variety seems to mark them as a spurious addition."* Although deviating widely from the usually-accepted interpretation, such an omission would bring that altered meaning really into more accordance with the character of the vision itself, and above all, with the grand key-note of the whole *Apocalypse* which we found struck in the opening chapter, as the *Revelation of "Him that was, and is, and is to come."* And while, as we have seen, the same divine harmony is sustained

* *Alford in loc.* I am much indebted to his suggestive notes in the present chapter. This, his interpretation of the introductory utterance, which I have sought merely to expand and illustrate, has been adopted by other reliable German commentators, such as Lachmann and Tischendorf.

throughout, it bursts in again, as we have also previously noted, with deeper and more significant impressiveness and grandeur, at the close of all. In the last chapter of Revelation (if we may be allowed here to anticipate) that topic is no less than four times adverted to. By including indeed one of these passages, we must own a reluctant concession,—the abandonment of a long loved and cherished interpretation; although the change is only to one equally beautiful, while it is more appropriate. The passage referred to, is that precious Gospel invitation, “And let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely;” words which, we are aware, are regarded by many devout Bible readers as an address ushered in and enforced by a threefold voice —“And the Spirit and the Bride say *come*: and let him that heareth say *come!*” If we keep, however, steadily in mind that leading theme and the analogy of the Book, allusion to ‘the Second coming’ will form the more natural interpretation of this verse also. In the context, Jesus had made twice over the announcement, “Behold I **COME** quickly.” And in the words immediately preceding, He had proclaimed that speedy Advent under the most beautiful and appropriate simile—as if the long weary night-watch of earth were nigh over, and the glorious sun-rising were at hand—“I am the Bright and Morning Star.” This herald-voice wakes into expectant joy the whole multitude of His ransomed people. Immediately the prayer goes up from the Church militant on earth, and gets a glad response from the

Church triumphant in Heaven;—it is the echo of His own announcement—“And the Spirit and the Bride say COME! and let him that heareth say COME!” And then, as the Apocalyptic drama is closing—as the last inspired vocables are dying away on the ear of the Apostle, that prayer seems answered. The words “COME! COME!” ascend before the Throne. The reply is given, “He who testifieth these things saith ‘surely I COME quickly.’” And yet again, the impassioned exclamation issues from the conjoint Church on earth and Heaven, forming, as we have repeatedly noted, the terminating cry of the Inspired Record—“Even so, COME Lord Jesus!”

Now, omit, as has been suggested, the two unauthorised words “*and see*,” which are added in our version, and then, in very beautiful accordance with these cognate passages, seems to be the monologue of the opening verse of this sixth chapter; also as repeated in verses 3, 5, 6. As the words at present stand, they must be regarded as a fourfold address, in turn, by the four living beings, to John, previous to the breaking of the four seals by the Lamb in the midst of the Throne. But, as it has been well observed,* the word ‘*come*,’ in the sense of approaching, would have been unsuitable here as addressed to the Apostle. He could not advance farther than he was. He was set by the opened door of Heaven, a stationary spectator; and immediately in front of him, as a needful interposing barrier, was ‘the sea of glass,’—like the bound set, in a former age, to the Israelites in the great Temple of nature on Mount Sinai, when

* See Alford.

the Shekinah cloud, the symbol of present Deity, rested on its summits, and they were forbidden on pain of instant death to draw nearer. How much more congruous with the structure of the book, and appropriate to its leading theme, if we regard this four times repeated 'COME' as identical with that which the Spirit and the Bride utter at its close!

In the present case, however, it emanates not from the Church, but from the four living creatures; those symbolic beings which we have already described as the representatives of God's vast Creation. As such, we may well regard that fourfold repetition as Creation's loud and anguished cry for the advent of her great Deliverer. We can hardly fail, in connection with this passage, to call to remembrance the Apostle's striking words in his Epistle to the Romans—"The earnest expectation of the creature (or, as that should rather be rendered, 'the creation') waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him (*i.e.*, man by his sin) who hath subjected the same. In hope, that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."* The call of these Four living beings then, is just the jubilant hope of material nature embodied in a sublime prayer. Creation 'in earnest expectation' 'groaning and travailing in pain,' had been longing for the hour when her birth-throes would be over,—when her iron chains of sin and sorrow

* Among others, see this rendering given and vindicated in Dr Wardlaw's Sermons, 1841.

would be broken, and she would be ushered into her glorious liberty. This “subjection”—these pains and sorrows—could only terminate by the COMING of her Great Lord. *That* was the grand event towards which all her longings and prayers were directed;—the bright rainbow of hope that spanned the lowering sky of a distant future. What can be more beautiful, therefore, than that these four living beings,—the impersonations of that Creation,—should make heaven and earth ring with the loud Advent-cry;—that the breaking of each of the four seals should be accompanied, like the reverberations following the flash of lightning, with the fourfold “COME! COME! COME! COME!” They had just sung in concert the anthem of material Nature. They had joined with the representatives of the redeemed Church in the New Song of Providence. They had heard the mighty chorus of redeemed and unredeemed in the song to the slain Lamb. And now, when those who had first awoke the strain, see the Lamb opening in succession the four seals of that roll which they knew contained every event that was to transpire previous to the Second Advent;—how befitting (though all in ignorance of its contents, and only desirous that no delay should frustrate the fulfilment of creation's hopes), that they should give utterance to her longing desire, ‘Make no tarrying, O my God,’ by the emphatic apostrophe, ‘COME!’ And this, moreover, would be in strict harmony with the two additional seals—the fifth and sixth. The slain martyrs' cry, though in different words, is also for their Lord's coming—“How long, Lord?” And the sixth

seal conducts to the very threshold of the Advent-scene ; —creation's sorest travail heralds the Epiphany of the Prince of Peace. Shall we be wrong, then, in interpreting these four successive exclamations, as nature's voice, —or rather the unsyllabled sighs and groanings of a dumb creation taken up by the four living ones, addressed, not to the Apostle, but to his enthroned Lord, the Opener of the seals ?—a voice from every corner of a now sin-stricken, woe-worn world, to Judah's Lion and the slain Lamb—‘ COME ! Thou Great Being of combined might and tenderness : break these fetters, and usher us into our glorious and promised freedom ! ’

“ Thy whole creation groans,
And waits to hear that voice
Which shall restore her comeliness,
And make her wastes rejoice.

COME, Lord, and wipe away
The curse, the sin, the stain,
And make this blighted world of ours
Thine own fair world again.
COME, then, Lord Jesus, COME ! ”

This fourfold cry receives a fourfold answer. A vision is given to the Apostle at the opening of each seal of the prophetic roll. In other words, four preparations for the Second Advent are symbolically unfolded to him. Alas ! they are visions more of trouble than of comfort. The roll, like that of Ezekiel, is full of lamentation, and mourning, and woe ; for it speaks of God's four sore judgments as these were revealed of old to the same Prophet—the Sword and War, Famine and Pestilence. He, however, who tempers judgment with mercy, begins

in the opening vision with a theme and pledge of comfort: for it is none other than John's adorable Lord Himself who appears in the scenic representation. The Lion and the slain Lamb still retain their places in the midst of the Throne. But apart from these, under the new and expressive symbolism of "a Rider on a white horse" (a horse 'white as light'), with a bow in his hand and a royal crown on his head—Jesus, the King and Lord of all, appears, heading a strange and varied equestrian procession. It is the reappearing of the prophetic Conqueror of the 45th Psalm—The King "fairer than the children of men," with His sword girt upon His thigh, in His majesty riding prosperously, because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness; His arrows sharp in the heart of the King's enemies, whereby the people fall under Him: recalling also the subsequent vision of chapter xix. 6, where the same Rider, similarly mounted and caparisoned, appears under the title of "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." Moreover, while in the three seals which follow, we only have, in equestrian symbol also, His followers and retainers—His approach is in the present case heralded by "the great voice" of the first chapter. There it was spoken of as "The voice of many waters." Here it is, "As it were the noise of thunder." The limitation assigned by some historic interpreters of the vision to mere human agents, is further negatived by the description which follows—"He went forth conquering and to conquer" (or, 'in order that He might conquer'). The kingdom of this symbolic warrior, unlike the gigantic ones of Babylon, Nineveh, Macedon,

and Rome, which triumphed, only in their turn to be overthrown—was to be ever advancing. That God-man Conqueror rides forth, invisible, on an errand of victory which cannot be frustrated: “Of the increase of His kingdom and government there is to be no end.” We have already had occasion to note the similarity between some of the visions of Ezekiel and those of John. There is another Jewish Prophet who seems to give the original framework of the present. Zechariah (chap. i.) records two visions which bear a striking resemblance to it. In the one he saw, by night, “a Man” (the same Divine-human Conqueror) riding on a red-coloured horse, and reining it up in the middle of some myrtle bushes that were growing in a valley. Behind Him were retainers mounted on horses also—their colour, red, speckled, and white; representing either His attendant ministering angels, or those providences which follow in His train and are subservient to His wishes. The other vision of the same Prophet is that of four chariots with red, black, white, grisled, and bay horses, going forth to different corners of the earth; representing, in slightly diverse form, these same ministering spirits, or ministering providences, under the bidding and control of the Great Head of the Church: for it is added “These are the four spirits of the Heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth.” Alike in these Old Testament and in the present New Testament figurations, the theme and thought of comfort is, that Christ—the Lord of all—either heads the procession or gives His agents their mission and decree. He Himself goes forth,

the first in the heavenly scene, marshalling all the other agencies and events, and making them subordinate to His will and pleasure. The very colour of the horse on which He is seated is not without its symbolic significance. Unlike the red, and livid, and black which follow, it is the White horse—the sure pledge of righteousness and ultimate peace and victory.

Such, then, was the first memorable vision vouchsafed to the Seer of Patmos. Whatever might be those which follow, John could never forget this opening one. His thoughts might be occupied with the details of the subsequent procession as it swept by, after the Leader was out of sight. But the animating presence of that Divine Precursor would never be obliterated. All were following in His wake. The missive had gone forth from Him that sat on the Throne, alike regarding angels and providences and human agents—“Behold, I have given **HIM** for a Witness to the people, *a Leader and Commander to the people.*” With a commencement of the Divine drama so full of sublime consolation, the Apostle is so far prepared for the very different visions which were next to follow.

We shall do little more than simply specify these. There was the Red horse with its appropriate rider—red (blood-red), the too truthfully symbolic colour of terrible war. There was the Black horse—its rider holding a pair of balances, in his hand,—the ordinary image of peaceful commerce, of barter and exchange; but here, the equally appropriate emblem of scarcity—when provisions have to be portioned out, not by bulk or measure, but by weight—

when the toiler of seed-time could reap nothing from the blighted fields ;—when the harvest sickles hang rusting in the granary, and the ‘famine pines in empty stalls.’ “The wheat and the barley, the wine and the oil” specified, are at famine prices: the usurious vendors dealing out a stinted pennyworth to the famishing and hunger-stricken. There was the Pale horse—green, livid, corpse-like—with ghastly skeleton Death as his rider ;—Hell or Hades, in grim copartnership, tracking his desolating path; the symbols and impersonations of the pestilence which walketh in darkness, and the destruction which wasteth at noonday ;—the mortality so sweeping, that the wild beasts of the earth are represented as holding their carnival in the waste and devastated region—the valleys of the shadow of death ! What are these successive figurations, but Christ Himself, under expressive imagery, rehearsing the significant sayings of His own great prophecy on Mount Olivet, as to the fearful judgments which were to be the forerunners of His second coming ? Is it the Red horse ? “Ye shall hear,” said He, “of wars and rumours of wars, nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.” Was it the Black and the Pale horse ? “There shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places—all these are the beginning of sorrows.” Appalling visions indeed ! partially fulfilled in the history of the last eighteen hundred years ; but which will doubtless have their main fulfilment in the times immediately preceding the Advent. And if the reflection suggests itself, How comes that loving

Prince ~~of~~ of Peace to have so ghastly and terrible a train of followers?—We answer, they are to be regarded, not as ministers of chastisement on His Church, but rather as His judgments on the unbelieving world;—as an illustrious French Protestant calls them, “The three scourges of the wrath of God.” * And it is *because*, even as such, they are anomalies in the kingdom of a great, and good, and beneficent Ruler—(the curses evoked by the sin of man)—that the fourfold cry goes up loud and plaintive from a suffering creation—‘COME! COME! Why tarry the wheels of Thy chariot? Undo the bandages that bind and cripple this wounded, anguished earth, and set her forth from her pining couch, walking, and leaping, and praising God!’ Never let us forget that it is sin which has been the author of all the miseries of an unhappy world. It is sin which has let slip from their leash the dogs of war. It is sin which has given the commission alike to the black horse of Famine and the pale horse of Death. It is sin which has written so many houses and hearths and hearts desolate, and made the world we dwell in, more a mausoleum of mortality than a home of the living. Shall we not long for that event, ‘the Blessed hope,’ which will terminate these symbols—these realities of sadness?—when the Royal Conqueror on the white horse shall turn round to His followers and say, “Thus far shall ye go and no farther?”—when these retainers shall dismount their ghastly steeds, the sword of war slumbering for ever in its scabbard:

* *Bossuet* quoted by Hengstenberg.

“ When Death shall yield his ancient reign,
And vanquished quit the field ! ”

Oh ! with all these untold miseries which sin has entailed and perpetuates to this hour, how appropriate, how sublime, is the loud, anguished cry which this vision so strikingly describes as going up into the ear of the God of Sabaoth, or rather into the ear of the great King and Head of His Church, from every corner of a burdened creation ! All nature seems to have become vocal—the earth has resolved itself into one vast oratory for united prayer. Its litany is monosyllabic. Its misery is too deep for language. It can articulate its grief only in the one expressive word—that word is “ *COME !* ” *Come !* cry the four representative living ones. *Come !* It is echoed back from rocks and mountains, dens and caves. *Come !* It is warbled by streams, and repeated by torrents, and thundered by ocean-waves. *Come !* It is chanted by winds, it is borne on the breath of the tempest, it is wafted amid the shrieks of perishing crews. *Come !* It rises in mute agony from the battlefields of the slain, the homes of haggard famine, the couches of the suffering, the beds of the dying. *Come !* It is heard amid the tramp of the funeral procession. It mingles with the wail of the mourner. It ascends, saturated with tears, from ten thousand graveyards. *Come* Blessed Redeemer ! break the seals, unfold the roll, let loose the vials. Prepare the pathway for Thy chariot—end the night-watch and usher in the glorious day !

Creation, God’s great world, animate and inani-

mate, is thus with giant voice, like a mighty Levite in the courts of her own temple, ever pleading for the hour of emancipation by the coming of her King. Shall we—shall the Church—with all her grander, profounder interest in that august event, fail to reciprocate her longings, and pray that her cry be heard and ratified? Shall not the Bride say COME, and him that heareth say COME? “Even so! COME Lord Jesus! COME quickly!” “Make haste my Beloved! be Thou like to a roe or young hart upon the mountains of spices!”

XL.

The Opening of the Fifth and Sixth
Seals—The Martyrs' Cry—And
the Great Day of Wrath.

“ AND WHEN HE HAD OPENED THE FIFTH SEAL, I SAW UNDER THE ALTAR THE SOULS OF THEM THAT WERE SLAIN FOR THE WORD OF GOD, AND FOR THE TESTIMONY WHICH THEY HELD : AND THEY CRIED WITH A LOUD VOICE, SAYING, HOW LONG, O LORD, HOLY AND TRUE, DOST THOU NOT JUDGE AND AVENGE OUR BLOOD ON THEM THAT DWELL ON THE EARTH ? AND WHITE ROBES WERE GIVEN UNTO EVERY ONE OF THEM ; AND IT WAS SAID UNTO THEM, THAT THEY SHOULD REST YET FOR A LITTLE SEASON, UNTIL THEIR FELLOW-SERVANTS ALSO, AND THEIR BRETHREN, THAT SHOULD BE KILLED AS THEY WERE, SHOULD BE FULFILLED. AND I BEHELD WHEN HE HAD OPENED THE SIXTH SEAL, AND, LO, THERE WAS A GREAT EARTHQUAKE ; AND THE SUN BECAME BLACK AS SACKCLOTH OF HAIR, AND THE MOON BECAME AS BLOOD ; AND THE STARS OF HEAVEN FELL UNTO THE EARTH, EVEN AS A FIG-TREE CASTETH HER UNTIMELY FIGS, WHEN SHE IS SHAKEN OF A MIGHTY WIND : AND THE HEAVEN DEPARTED AS A SCROLL WHEN IT IS ROLLED TOGETHER ; AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND ISLAND WERE MOVED OUT OF THEIR PLACES : AND THE KINGS OF THE EARTH, AND THE GREAT MEN, AND THE RICH MEN, AND THE CHIEF CAPTAINS, AND THE MIGHTY MEN, AND EVERY BONDMAN, AND EVERY FREE MAN, HID THEMSELVES IN THE DENS, AND IN THE ROCKS OF THE MOUNTAINS ; AND SAID TO THE MOUNTAINS AND ROCKS, FALL ON US, AND HIDE US FROM THE FACE OF HIM THAT SITTETH ON THE THRONE, AND FROM THE WRATH OF THE LAMB : FOR THE GREAT DAY OF HIS WRATH IS COME ; AND WHO SHALL BE ABLE TO STAND ? ”—REV. VI. 9-17.

THE OPENING OF THE FIFTH AND SIXTH SEALS—THE MARTYRS' CRY—AND THE GREAT DAY OF WRATH.

In the previous chapter we considered Creation's cry for the coming of her great King, and the visions accompanying the opening of the first four seals of the prophetic roll. The symbolic personages revealed to the Apostle, at all events in the three latter, represented the variety of appalling judgments which were to be visited on the earth and on its guilty inhabitants. But what, meanwhile, of the Church? It is this, under a new and peculiar figuration, to which his attention is next called on the opening of the *Fifth seal*.

The locality of the scenic representation is changed. While it was athwart the broad earthly landscape, that John, from his place at the heavenly vestibule, had seen these strange equestrian riders go forth on their several commissions;—it is now inside the celestial sanctuary his eye is turned. At the base of an altar, similar to that with which he was familiar in the courts of the earthly Jerusalem, he listens to voices proceeding from some shadowy human forms. But not, as he had shortly before heard, uttering melody and praise, but rather a loud wail of suffering,—not the voices of the living, but, if the expression can be used, the

voices of the dead. It was the cry “ of them that were slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held,”—a cry extending from the death of the proto-martyr Stephen, onwards through long gloomy centuries of persecution and hate.

Time would fail to enumerate the voices which mingled in that cry—to rehearse the entries in that illustrious roll of heroic endurance:—the martyrs of the Roman catacombs, who have left the significant signature of their sufferings on vases and monumental tablets in these subterranean vaults,—their blood thus crying from beneath the ground;*—the martyrs of Lyons in the age of Irenæus,—the Waldenses and Albigenses of subsequent centuries,—the devoted thousands in the valleys of Perosa and San Martino, or amid the savage wilds of Dormilleuse;—the Huguenots of a still later epoch,—those involved in the massacres of St Bartholomew, the fires of Smithfield, the secret tortures of dungeon and inquisition, which no human pen was ever suffered to describe, down to the Madagascar martyrs of our own century:—all who have perished by the sword or the axe, the flame and faggot, the hemlock and poison-cup, the cross and the stake; hurled from the precipice, or torn amid the savage shouts of the amphitheatre; all who may have a similar legacy of suffering bequeathed to them in the Church of the future. These martyrs are represented as having their blood, like that of the *sacrificial* victims of old,† poured out at the foot of the altar. Not, be it observed, the golden altar of incense of a subse-

* See Elliot's *Horæ Apoc.*, vol. i., p. 201.

† Lev. iv. 7.

quent chapter ; but the great brazen altar of burnt-offering, where piacular or bloody offerings were alone presented. The figuration is in accordance with the literal words of the Prince of Martyrs—the great Apostle himself—when, in anticipation of a violent death, he thus with calm fortitude asserts his preparation—“ I am now ready to be offered,” (or literally) to “ pour out” my life—my blood—as an oblation.

From the blood of these martyrs in the vision, flowing at the base of the altar, there is an appellant voice represented as rising loud before Him who sitteth on the throne—“ How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth ? ”

It is of importance, however, that we note a peculiarity in the imagery; lest by a false interpretation we be led to regard this as an unworthy cry of vengeance uttered by the disembodied souls of the departed,—an imprecation unbefitting the lips of the followers of Him whose dying prayer was that of forgiveness for His enemies ;—unbefitting the crowned victors who bore their sufferings so meekly, and who might well now forget the fiery chariot which bore them to so glorious a heaven.

Were it no more than to bring the present vision into harmony with subsequent ones, it could not be the souls of the martyred witnesses (in the sense of their glorified spirits) which are here represented as uttering the loud quest to an avenging God. For these, in the very next chapter, are spoken of as having already entered upon their state of exalted bliss, amid the crowd of

jubilant worshippers, before the Throne and the Lamb, “clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.” It is rather by a bold and beautiful symbol—their natural or animal life—“the blood, which is the life thereof,”*—sending up its dumb inarticulate protestation into the ear of a Holy Judge. † They are themselves (their immortal spirits), as we have just said, above and beyond all such wail of earthly suffering. But at the base of that heavenly altar, on which they are beautifully represented as having yielded their lives in sacrifice to God, they have left their own blood-drops to plead in silence. “How long, O Lord?” “O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth: O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, show thyself!”

Meanwhile it is added—“White robes were given unto every one of them.” These white robes are generally taken, simply as the evidences of justification and acknowledged righteousness before God. But when Bengel calls the “white stolae, or long white vestments, an excellent ornament and high honour,” he indicates what we think is a truer and more appropriate meaning. May we not regard them as the distinctive badges of martyrdom and suffering;—glistering attire superadded to the “white robes” common to the whole Church triumphant specified in a future vision;—heavenly decorations of peculiar and pre-eminent glory, like the stars in the crown elsewhere spoken of, which are given as the dis-

* Deut. xii. 23.

† I follow in this the view taken by the best, or nearly all, modern commentators.

tinguishing mark of those who 'turn many to righteousness'?

The cry from that altar-base was not to be in vain. It is abundantly answered, in the subsequent figurations, amid the soundings of the trumpets and the outpouring of the vials. God's law of righteous retributive vengeance can admit of no relaxation, either in the case of nations or individuals. Persecuting Rome-Pagan and persecuting Rome-Papal would in due time have their scourges, to verify and ratify the truthfulness of the saying, "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." "Shall not God avenge His own elect, who cry to Him day and night?" said One greater than the greatest of these martyred dead; "I tell you He will avenge them, and that speedily." The "souls," however, in the vision, were told meanwhile to wait for the complement of that noble army of martyrs. It was said unto them that "they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled."

Such then is the vision accompanying the opening of the Fifth seal, the heavenly altar of sacrifice, and the martyrs' cry.

Turn we now to the *Sixth seal*. It may deliberately be affirmed that there is no word-painting (if the term may, without irreverence, be used of inspired writing) so grand and impressive in all Scripture, as this "memory of Patmos." The most daring of modern imaginative

artists has selected it as his greatest work,—although his treatment, however powerful, is confessedly tame side by side with the majestic language of the Apostle-exile. As in the preceding vision, John's eye had been abstracted from the equestrian symbols of the four first seals, to gaze on a great altar of sacrifice within the celestial Temple: so now again, is he called back from the heavenly to the old earthly landscape—to sun, moon, and stars, rocks, and islands, and mountains. But these are in a state of convulsion and chaos. Nature, in a paroxysm of agony, reels to her centre. Not now, among living creatures and elders;—not now, among the white-robed martyrs;—not now an auditor of the sweet psalmodies of the skies;—but among earth's varied tenantry, from the crowned monarch to the bond slave in his chains, he listens to a wild but unavailing cry for succour. And who is it that has evoked this wail of terror? It is no earthly despot—no earthly incarnation of tyranny and oppression. It is not even the subordinate figurative riders of the preceding seals, mounted on the red horse of war, the black horse of famine, the pale horse of pestilence and death. It is One “mightier than the mightiest.” It is the august Being seated on the Throne. It is the wrath, not of a perishable mortal, but “the wrath of the LAMB.” The wrath of man is great; the rage of the nations, as depicted in the sequel of the Book, is terrible; the track of the conqueror is “with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood.” But what is this, compared to what forms the climax and closing of this appalling vision—“the Day, the Great day” (as it stands

in the original *) “of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?”

Now, to what does this tremendous description refer? In answering the question, we must bear in mind here also, that the interpretation of the present vision must be in harmony with those which precede it. While what is called the historical school regard these seals as representing successive epochs or eras following one another in chronological sequence, and their fulfilment exhausted when the eras are past; we are disposed far rather to consider the figurations, not as progressive, neither as restricted in their application to any one particular period, but, as it has been happily named “co-ordinate,” extending over the entire ages of the Church, from the time in which John wrote to the end of the world.† Nor is it any violation of this theory, to credit some particular epochs with a larger share of the realities described in

* ἡ ἡμέρα ἡ μεγάλη.

† “The Apocalypse is a sequel to Hebrew poetry. . . . Now, if we examine the prophecies of Daniel and Zechariah, we find they are not progressive. The predictions and visions of the Book of Daniel are not riveted together, like links in a continuous chain: they form a system of collateral chains, not indeed all of equal length. Or, to adopt another figure, they are like a succession of charts in a geographical atlas. . . . It might have been anticipated that the Apocalypse, which was dictated by the same Divine Spirit who inspired the Hebrew Prophets, and who is a Spirit of order, would be constructed on the same method as those other prophecies of Daniel and Zechariah, of which it is the sequel and completion. ‘As Daniel,’ says Dr Lightfoot, ‘gives a general view, in his second chapter, of his own times to the coming of Christ, and then handles the same thing in another scheme in the seventh chapter, and there doth express at large and more particularly some of the most material things that he had touched in these particulars, so does St John in the Apocalypse.’”—Dr WORDSWORTH’s *Introduction*, p. 148.

the visions than others. The red horse of War may have been more rampant in one age than another : in that of Nero and Vespasian, Alaric and Attila, Mahomet and Saladin, Tamerlane or Napoleon. The black rider of Scarcity may have had to poise his balances with a more trembling hand in one era than another : for example, during the Roman age—in the reigns of Alexander Severus and Caracalla, which enjoyed an unhappy distinction for their grinding taxation and merciless fiscal oppression ; or during those invasions which desolated the dismembering Empire of the Cæsars, and when millions were left to send up their unsuccoured cry amid once smiling fields, now blackened with ashes and smoke, dearth and famine. The grim rider with his follower on the Pale horse, may have had wider scope at one time than another for their baleful work, in the decimating plague and pestilence. The cry of the martyrs was doubtless louder, than it has been before or since, in what was pre-eminently called “ The Martyr age ”—during the reigns of Diocletian, Galerius, and Valerian—the first grand effort of Pagan Rome to strangle the infant religion at its birth ;—or, again, during the great struggles of the era of the Reformation. But still, the visions are not to be limited or restricted to any period, or to any special historic events ; but rather are to be regarded as co-extensive with the history of Christendom ; partially fulfilled in the past, and having, it may be, a fuller and ampler exposition in reversion.

The Sixth seal must, in this respect, be in harmony with its predecessors. Those who adopt the purely his-

torical view, and represent this wondrous description to have exhausted its fulfilment with the others in the earlier centuries, appear to restrict it to events altogether incommensurate in importance and grandeur with the language of the seal itself. In accordance, indeed, with the general and enlarged interpretation we have assigned to the previous seals, we are far from asserting that this last may not also have had a partial fulfilment in some of those more appalling revolutions which in the course of eighteen centuries have convulsed the nations. The language of Orientalism—the language of Scripture—deals greatly in *hyperbole*. Figures are often employed to describe events which, to the prosaic Western mind, would appear overwrought, exaggerated, and unreal. Moreover, we must remember, that the very same symbolism here employed—the veiling of the heavens, the darkened sun and falling stars—was adopted by the Jewish Prophets to depict the woes impending on their own country and capital.* We are not therefore disposed to question that, in a primary though subordinate sense, these vast firmamental convulsions may apply to the subversion of the enthroned despotisms and tyrannies of the world; and specially to the greatest of all moral and social revolutions, which occurred at the commencement of the Christian era—the downfall of Paganism in the Empire of Rome. But yet we ask, What unsophisticated Christian—what simple reader of his Bible—can peruse these words, and rest in any inter-

* Isa. xxxiv. 8, 4, ii. 12, 19; Joel ii. 30, 31; Nah. i. 6; Hos. x. 8; Hag. ii. 6, 7.

pretation short of the culminating one,—that we have here an unmistakable description of THE DAY OF JUDGMENT? Among all the revolutions of earth (and making, too, every allowance for the boldness and license of oriental symbolism), what one of them can for a moment lay claim to such a delineation as this? Whereas, on the other hand, it does appear an appropriate conclusion to a series of visions containing a synopsis of the world's history subsequently to be amplified, to have thus depicted in magnificent colouring the final scene of all—the terminating event of long ages and centuries, in the descent of her great Lord and King to His throne of Judgment; accompanied with the wild cry of 'the fearful and the unbelieving,' to be hidden from the wrath of the Lamb, as they invoke rocks and mountains to screen them from His withering glance.

Nor, on this account, can we acquiesce in the views of those who have otherwise thrown important light on the mysteries of the Book—that this sixth seal describes, not the Judgment itself, but events immediately preceding it. Such an interpretation would not dovetail with other express assertions, alike of our Lord and His Apostles, as to the utter unpreparedness of a slumbering Church as well as a slumbering world for the Advent. What are Christ's own oft-repeated declarations? Are they not these:—that that Day is to overtake "as a thief;"—"as a snare" it is to come upon all the world; or with the speed of the lightning-flash. What is the testimony of St Peter? Is it not, that the cry of the suffering world on the very eve of the Advent will be, "Where is the

promise of His coming?"—that testimony followed with the explicit assertion (as if at the moment he remembered the words of old, of his great Master), "But the day of the Lord *will* come as a thief in the night." From these and other similar statements, we should be rather led to infer, that the kings of the earth, instead of being then seized with despair and dismay at the anticipation of the Lord's coming, and according an extorted homage to a Judge yet unrevealed,—will be living in a state of daring defiance and sceptic indifference, leaving belief in the tale of priestly terror to the weak and credulous,—making merry, and sending gifts one to another, with a haughty confidence in the permanency of their thrones and crowns—deeming the world, instead of hoary with wrinkles, to be gifted with immortal youth. How much more natural the rendering—how much more in accordance with Scripture analogy—how almost *necessary* for an honest and faithful verbal interpretation, to take it as the description, not of Christ's coming as imminent, but Christ's coming as accomplished—"the Day, that great Day" waited for by all time, as having "surprised the hypocrites!" A daring defiant world that had long treated the warning as an idle dream, now by the heaving earthquake, and the falling stars, and the blackened sun, and the blood-red moon, awakes up to the awful verity. The despots who lived for ambition, and the misers who lived for gold, and the mighty men—the warriors who made the earth to tremble, and lived for fame;—the freeman in his fancied freedom, and the toiling slave in his iron fetters,—all (be their station what

it may) who have lived a selfish, sceptic existence, but now roused in a moment to a bitter agonising sense of their misery and ruin, call upon rock and mountain-cave to screen and cover them from the wrath of the Lamb—"For the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?" Does not, indeed, the Saviour Himself, in significant and emphatic words, uttered in His own final prophecy on the Mount of Olives, give the best commentary on this seal. The very language and figures He employs are the same as here:—"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and THEN shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, AND *they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven*, with power and great glory" (Matt. xxiv. 29, 30).

What are our feelings in the prospect of "that Day,—that great Day?" It is the only one—at all events out of four of the previous visions—in which we have each of us individually a sure and certain personal interest. The red horse of war, we know only in pondering the sad annals of the past, or the records of contemporary history; our eyes (God grant it) may never see the plungings of that crimson steed and the unsheatheings of that terrible sword. Although ever and anon, in other districts of the world, we hear of the locust and the drought together marking out the desolating pathway of the black horse of

scarcity ; and although many a pining heart at home, in dens of misery, is familiar with the gaunt visage ; yet that sable steed and its balance-bearing rider is a stranger, and in all probability will ever be, to those whose eyes trace these pages. The pale horse of death, in the terrific sense of plague and pestilence, only lingers in the recollection of a few : we have never seen the dreaded mark of doleful memory affixed on stricken doorways—the lumbering wain gathering its bundles in the awful harvest, and pursuing its errand amid silent streets. The martyr's cry has been heard in our days in the islands of the Pacific and within Spanish and Italian dungeons ; but it is a stranger, and will, we trust ever be so, in this land of glorious light and freedom, where social and spiritual slavery are alike unknown. But not so the awful verity contained in the Sixth seal. We cannot decipher the hieroglyphics of the future—we cannot dare read the times and seasons of prophecy ; but this we do know, that sooner or later the hour will arrive, when our ears shall hear that earthquake's sound,—our eyes witness these departing heavens. Oh ! with what different feelings will that event be contemplated by the two great divisions into which mankind shall then resolve themselves ;—when all the conventional distinctions of earth shall be ended for ever,—when the rich and the poor, the king and the peasant, the bond and the free, shall meet together under the blaze of that descending Throne ! The wicked,—those who have rejected and neglected the great salvation—spurned the offers of pardon—despised the day of grace—dishonoured the

Saviour's name—dethroned Him from their hearts and lives,—when 'that Day, that great Day' bursts upon them in all its appalling and dazzling splendours—when the earth is shaking, and the heavens are dissolving, and the stars falling from their orbits,—it will not be one or all of these spectacles on which their eyes will be fixed in trembling agony. *One Object*, and one Object alone (as if their senses were locked to all others), will arrest their gaze, and from which they will try in vain to escape:—“Behold! HE cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see HIM.” They make dumb nature their god, uttering wild imprecations to its rocks and mountains, “Fall on us! and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the Throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb!” But there is no response; Creation, loyal to its great Maker, is deaf to the call. That wrath must be borne; that withering glance of rejected, unrequited love must be endured. “Who shall be able to stand?” receives no answer in the heavens above, or in the depths beneath. We can imagine the sinner rushing from spot to spot in a wild delirium of despair, making rock and mountain echo to the wail from which there is no response—“Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?”

But “who shall be able to stand?” That cry—that question in the lips of the true and devoted followers of the Lamb—*can* be answered. In that wildest drama of God's moral and material creation, there will be to him one glorious Rock of shelter and safety, whither he may flee until the indignation be overpast. “A MAN shall

be as an hiding-place from the wind, and as a covert from the tempest." That Lamb, whose wrath will be so terrible to the scorers of His grace, will be the Dispenser of love and blessing to His own people. The pillar-cloud, all dark with terror and wrath to the Egyptians, will be gleaming with light and glory to His covenant Israel. The Hand, in the one case, 'strong to smite,' will, in the other, be 'strong to save.'

Let none leave the safety of that day to hang on the risk of a peradventure. Let not the question remain in perilous uncertainty—"Am I among the saved, or the not saved?" Shall I stand, or shall I not stand? Shall that revelation of revelations be to me a revelation of wrath and terror, or one of peace and joy? Can I, even now, take up, in anticipation, the song of one of the glorified dead?—

"Bold shall I stand on that Great Day;
For who aught to my charge shall lay,
When by Thy blood absolved I am
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame?" *

Yes! it will be 'the Blood'—the blood sprinkled on the lintels and door-posts—that will then be the passover to that righteous wrath. Flee to it now. "Haste thee—escape for thy life. Look not behind thee: neither stay thou in all the plain." Escape! for, as ye linger, the ominous clouds may be gathering—the now slumbering earthquake may be about to burst—and grace and repentance and mercy may be among the things of an irrevocable past. Blessed be God, that Day has not yet

* John Wesley.

overtaken,—Mercy still lingers on the steps of her golden throne. The order in the vision of the great Prophet of another age is transposed. The “still small voice” of redeeming love is now heard preceding “the earthquake, the wind, and the fire.” Oh ! hearken to its message of pardon and peace, ere, in the midst of these symbols of terror and judgment-ire, ‘ onward comes the Lord ’! That thus—

“ While sinners in despair shall call,
‘ Rocks hide us !—mountains on us fall !’
The saints, victorious o’er the tomb,
May sing for joy—‘ **THE LORD IS COME !** ’ ”



XII.

The Vision of the Sealed.

"AND AFTER THESE THINGS I SAW FOUR ANGELS STANDING ON THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE EARTH, HOLDING THE FOUR WINDS OF THE EARTH, THAT THE WIND SHOULD NOT BLOW ON THE EARTH, NOR ON THE SEA, NOR ON ANY TREE. AND I SAW ANOTHER ANGEL ASCENDING FROM THE EAST, HAVING THE SEAL OF THE LIVING GOD: AND HE CRIED WITH A LOUD VOICE TO THE FOUR ANGELS, TO WHOM IT WAS GIVEN TO HURT THE EARTH AND THE SEA, SAYING, HURT NOT THE EARTH, NEITHER THE SEA, NOR THE TREES, TILL WE HAVE SEALED THE SERVANTS OF OUR GOD IN THEIR FOREHEADS. AND I HEARD THE NUMBER OF THEM WHICH WERE SEALED: AND THERE WERE SEALED AN HUNDRED AND FORTY AND FOUR THOUSAND OF ALL THE TRIBES OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL. OF THE TRIBE OF JUDA WERE SEALED TWELVE THOUSAND. OF THE TRIBE OF REUBEN WERE SEALED TWELVE THOUSAND. OF THE TRIBE OF GAD WERE SEALED TWELVE THOUSAND. OF THE TRIBE OF ASER WERE SEALED TWELVE THOUSAND. OF THE TRIBE OF NEPHALIM WERE SEALED TWELVE THOUSAND. OF THE TRIBE OF MANASSES WERE SEALED TWELVE THOUSAND. OF THE TRIBE OF SIMEON WERE SEALED TWELVE THOUSAND. OF THE TRIBE OF LEVI WERE SEALED TWELVE THOUSAND. OF THE TRIBE OF ISSACHAR WERE SEALED TWELVE THOUSAND. OF THE TRIBE OF ZABULON WERE SEALED TWELVE THOUSAND. OF THE TRIBE OF JOSEPH WERE SEALED TWELVE THOUSAND. OF THE TRIBE OF BENJAMIN WERE SEALED TWELVE THOUSAND."—REV. VII. 1-8.

THE VISION OF THE SEALED.

THE sixth chapter, as we have seen, contains a description of the opening of the first six seals of the prophetic roll. We regarded these as presenting a synopsis of the history and experiences of the Church, from the beginning of the Christian era to the end of the world ; the terminating one of the series containing a vivid, but unmistakable, description of the Day of Judgment. The cry had just fallen on the ears of John, from the terror-stricken myriads—"The great day of His wrath is come : and who shall be able to stand ?" Can we wonder that, after such words and such a scene as this, the Apostle should feel himself awed and confounded ? If such be the tremendous judgments on a guilty world, could he fail to have the question suggested to him, What as to the safety and security of believers—the Family of God ? In the midst of that deluge of predicted wrath, could the ark be relied on to ride out the storm ? Was there any sure provision made by the Church's great Head to shield and shelter His own people until the indignation be overpast ?

There is a pause before the opening of the seventh seal—an episode or interlude, as it has been expressed, in the epic drama—in order to answer this interrogatory. The perturbed spirit of the spectator is calmed by a two-

fold vision. Although the chapter commences with the words, "After these things," we are not to infer that what follows was intended as an historical continuation—a chronological sequence to the preceding revelations. That could not be, if we are correct in considering the Sixth seal as referring to the Judgment-day. These six seals, in accordance with that interpretation, must be taken as complete in themselves, commencing with the picture of the crowned Conqueror riding forth on the white horse of triumph, and ending with that same august Being coming amid symbols of awful majesty to the great assize. With that closing catastrophe the series ends; and any visions subsequently given, can only be additional illustrations, by a new set of symbols, of the antecedent ones. Although, therefore, the two figurations of the present chapter may point with a more special application to "the time of the end," and the judgments immediately preceding the Second Advent,—their consolatory words embrace the whole existence of the Church. They are spoken for us, and for our age, as well as for the days of Augustine, or for the mysterious Armageddon era of an unrevealed future.

The First vision contains a representation of the security of the Church on earth. The Second, of the bliss of the Church in Heaven. In other words, the safety of the Church militant, and the glory of the Church triumphant. It is the first of the two which is now alone to occupy our thoughts.

John beheld "four angels standing on the four corners

of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree." We shall come immediately to the figurative interpretation of these symbols: but we are not precluded, in the first instance, from accepting them in a literal sense, as representing the elements of nature delegated to the keeping of Angels. Winds, and earthquakes, and tempests are not the capricious outbreaks of unregulated mechanical force. Physical laws are, in the loftiest sense, the exponents and expressions of a Higher Will. "He holdeth the winds in His fists." "He gathereth the waters in the hollow of His hand." "He maketh the clouds His chariot." "The Lord sitteth on the water-floods; yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever." Let us not dethrone and undeify the great Maker and Sustainer, by substituting for His sovereign rule what are called the laws and sequences of nature. God, indeed, works by law. He is a God of order—not of confusion. But the world's machinery, with all its varied and intricate movements, is not less under His supervision and control than higher moral agencies. It was an elevating theme of comfort to the awe-struck Apostle, amid the moral hurricanes that were threatening to break forth, that even the forces of outer nature were under the governance and regulation of the great Lord of all. Though man sees them not, and science in her pride may smile at the fantasy, there are sentinel-angels—angels of repression and restraint—holding back the impatient winds, controlling the tempests, and calming angry seas; suffering no hurricane to go forth on its mission of ven-

geance until He gives the word. It offers a lesson of soothing consolation to many a stricken heart. That volleyed lightning which struck down my child was an arrow out of the quiver of God ;—that wave which swept him from the vessel's side—that hurricane which overthrew my dwelling, and buried loved ones in the ruins—had their pathway marked out by God. *He* brings forth the lightning out of His treasures ; *He* gives the sea its decree ; *He* walketh on the wings of the wind. And if we have been mercifully shielded from accident—if lightning and tempest have passed us by unscathed, and the waves that have submerged other barks have brought ours to the desired haven ;—without casting one doubt on the order and stability of physical laws, let us think of John's imagery as the true and ultimate cause of our safety ;—the angels of God, at His omnipotent bidding, holding back the winds of the earth, “ that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.”

But if it be admissible, in the first instance, to give to the vision this natural and primary meaning, doubtless its language has a higher signification with reference to moral tempests, and the merciful subordination of these to the controlling will and purposes of the Most High. This interpretation is brought out with greater force and signification in the verse which follows. John was attracted by the sight of “ another Angel ascending from the east ” (or ‘ the sun-rising ’). This new celestial visitant has been considered by some as only one of the

many glorious hosts of the skies, though more glorious and honoured than his fellows. But are we not abundantly warranted in according to him a loftier nature still? May we not rather recognise him, under another name and figuration, as the crowned Conqueror of the opening seal—the great Angel of the Covenant? His place of advent is from “the sun-rising”—the region of glad hope and rejoicing; an emblem, moreover, more than once used in connection with Christ’s Person and glory. Had not the father of the Baptist previously described his coming Saviour as “the Day-spring from on high,” giving light to the dwellers in darkness and in the shadow of death? Had not that Saviour thus announced Himself—“I am the Light of the world?” And as the figure of ‘ascending from the east’ tells of life as well as light, had not the Apostle of Patmos asserted of Him in his opening Gospel, “In Him was *Life*, and the life was the *Light of men*?” This mightiest of Angels—this mightier than angels—had in His hand “the seal of the living (or “the life-giving”) God;” and He cried—as if claiming superiority over the four angels to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, “saying, hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.” If it be objected to such an interpretation, that the phraseology used, “Our God,” would be out of place in the lips of the co-equal Son—it is not really so. All throughout the Book of Revelation, in reference to the adorable Person of Christ, there is a beautiful blending of the Divine and the human,—the majesty of Deity with the assumption of the true though

sinless manhood. Were not these His own words in the days of His flesh,—not in a moment of profound humiliation, but in the hour of glorious triumph, when the trophies of His great victory were lying scattered around the mouth of His sepulchre,—“I ascend to my Father and your Father, to *my God* and your God?” The Apostle Paul too speaks of God as *the God* as well as *the Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ.* In the same loud voice, then, which met us in the opening chapter of the Book, this august Being utters His inhibition to the four angels of the four winds. He calls on them to keep these in check until they receive His summons. Zechariah’s Horseman in the midst of the myrtle-trees is again recalled, who had his angel-retinue *behind* him, so that no myrtle branch could be touched until they had his authority to do so. However scriptural and however comforting may be the thought of the ministry of angels, let us ever think of them as subservient to Him whose pleasure they fulfil. As in the case of Mary of old, these bright Beings are in themselves unable to dry a tear and take the load off a sorrowful heart; no answer can they give to the quest of the anxious soul, “They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.” But, as it was in her experience also,—when the great Redeemer whose deserted tomb they had been watching comes to her, as she stood weeping and disconsolate,—the tears which angels fail to wipe away

* See Trench, p. 98, where he vindicates the interesting reading of the promise of Christ to the church of Ephesus, “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the Tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of *my God*”—Rev. ii. 7.

are wiped away by Him. In our hours of trial, when we listen to the deep moan of the moral tempest—when all is brooding night around us—when in our darkened firmament, star after star, it may be, of earthly hope has been quenched from sight,—let us turn toward the eastern horizon, Heaven's own region of hope and consolation. Let us look for that “ascending Angel” of light and life—saying, “My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that do watch for the morning.” In the “Pilgrim’s Progress,” the window of the chamber called Peace, in which Christian lay, “opened toward the sunrise.” Steadfastly gazing on Him thus so appropriately symbolised, let us take the inspired words as alike a prophecy and a promise, and that too for a darkened heart as well as for a benighted world—“Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his beams.” *

There is a special purpose here spoken of in connection with the sudden advent of this Angel of the Dayspring. It was to repress judgment, only until a certain object was attained—till the true servants and people of God had been “sealed in their foreheads.” The language employed reminds us of those faithful few in the days of Ezekiel, who, when terrific judgments were about to burst on Jerusalem, had a mark set on their foreheads by the man clothed in linen with the inkhorn at his side. John

* Elliot notes, that in Luke i. 78, the Greek word for the ‘Dayspring’ is ‘ἀνατολὴ’. And so too the LXX render Zech. iii. 8, “I will bring forth my servant, την Ἀνατολὴν.” Not as our version, “the Branch.” See also Lowth.

heard the number of those that were thus sealed. He minutely records them;—12,000 of each tribe of the children of Israel—*Israel*, the figurative, representative name of the Christian Church: in all, 144,000—the number symbolic of completeness. The whole of the tribes too were included;—the lowliest as well as the greatest;—the crouching servile tribe of Issachar as well as the Lion tribe of Judah. What was this, but, under the most beautiful and expressive of figures, to proclaim that of the Church which Christ has redeemed, not one shall be wanting—that “all Israel shall be saved?” As in that most memorable of incidents in Old Testament story, when the Hebrew people stood on the shores of the Red Sea and made it echo to their song of triumph, there was not so much as a hoof left behind,—not a child or suckling that had perished amid the roar and heaving of the refluent waters,—all were saved with a great salvation; so is it with the true Israel of God in every age. The floods may have lifted up their waves and made a mighty noise; but “the Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters—yea, than the mighty waves of the sea.” Their experience is, “We went through the flood on foot; there did we rejoice in Him.” A greater than Moses—the triumphant leader of His ransomed people—as He stands on the earthly shores of His stupendous victory, can say, “Those whom Thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost.” John, as we have seen, had just been the witness of terrific revelations,—“the sea and the waves roaring, and men’s hearts failing them for fear.” He had beheld the earth moved, and the mountains

carried into the midst of the sea, the waters thereof roaring and troubled, the mountains shaking with the swelling thereof. He had seen direful invaders—Plague, Pestilence, Famine, Death—go forth on their baleful mission. He had heard the cry of innocent blood ascending from the base of the altar. He had seen awful signs in sun, and moon, and falling stars; and voices more awful still, calling for shelter from Infinite wrath. Oh! when upon the vision of the Apostle there bursts this aggregate of terror—terrors greater far than those which desolated of old the doomed cities of the plain,—what says the great Covenant Angel to His servant (the Lot of the Apocalypse)? It is in the spirit of the words which were uttered to that same dweller in Sodom, as the sun in his case too was rising upon the earth—“Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither.” Not a bolt can descend upon the world to destroy it, until all the people of God be gathered in, and the number of His elect be accomplished. Individual trials—personal afflictions—the Church collectively, and believers individually, must and will endure; they have a patrimony and heritage of tribulation: but their spiritual safety is unassailable. Every member of the tribe of true Israel is sealed in his forehead by the seal of the living God—God’s own indelible mark of election and adoption—God’s own pledge of inviolable security. The deluge may sweep as it may, but the covenant Ark, containing its sacred 144,000, will rise buoyant on the waters. The Lord, as in the case of Noah’s family, has ‘shut them in:’ and that Ark will do battle

with the storm, until it is moored on the top of the true Ararat—the Mount of everlasting ‘rest,’—surrounded by the new heavens and the new earth.

Let us rejoice in this covenant safety. Let us rejoice, —not indeed that we are exempt from the trials of life, for that we are not,—but that God will allow no trial to be sent but which is for our good. There was an Angel for every wind; there is a restraint on every judgment. He will not tempt us above that we are able to bear. Of that true “God of tempests,” natural and moral (of which the *Œolus* of the Greeks was the Pagan fiction), it is sublimely said, “He stayeth His rough wind in the day of His east wind.” If we have this seal, this mark of God upon us, it will form a mighty talisman to dispel all real evil during life. It will be like the blood sprinkled on the lintels and door-posts of old, when the destroying Angel passes by. It will form a glorious passport in the hour of death into the regions of bliss. And, as if to make sure that none shall be missing on the great Day of Judgment, “He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

But, in closing our contemplation of this vision, let us bear in mind that the sealing, which has its precious lesson of security and safety, has also its solemn lesson of responsibility. Sealing indicates property, possession, appropriation, on the part of the sealer. As the sealed of God, we are the property of Christ. “Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price.” The ancient seal con-

tained the name of the king, who put his own mark on his slaves or servants. That seal of John's vision, set on the foreheads of His true Israel, has engraven on it, so to speak, the very name of God. Part of the promise to the Church of Philadelphia, in a preceding chapter, is this,—“ I will write upon him *the name of my God*, and the name of the city of my God.” The writing of the name should indicate preparation and readiness to enter the celestial city. Is it so with us? Does our character correspond with our charter of heavenly citizenship, demanding as a qualification that “ holiness without which no man can see the Lord?” Christ calls us here “ *the servants of our God*.” Have we risen to any true realisation of the grandeur and the destiny of such a name as this?

XIII.

Vision of the White-robed and Palm-bearing Multitude.

“AFTER THIS, I BEHELD, AND LO, A GREAT MULTITUDE, WHICH NO MAN COULD NUMBER, OF ALL NATIONS, AND KINDREDS, AND PEOPLE, AND TONGUES, STOOD BEFORE THE THRONE, AND BEFORE THE LAMB, CLOTHED WITH WHITE ROBES, AND PALMS IN THEIR HANDS ; AND CRIED WITH A LOUD VOICE ; SAYING, SALVATION TO OUR GOD WHICH SITTETH UPON THE THRONE, AND UNTO THE LAMB. AND ALL THE ANGELS STOOD ROUND ABOUT THE THRONE, AND ABOUT THE ELDERS, AND THE FOUR BEASTS, AND FELL BEFORE THE THRONE ON THEIR FACES, AND WORSHIPPED GOD, SAYING, AMEN : BLESSING, AND GLORY, AND WISDOM, AND THANKSGIVING, AND HONOUR, AND MIGHT, BE UNTO OUR GOD FOR EVER AND EVER. AMEN. AND ONE OF THE ELDERS ANSWERED, SAYING UNTO ME, WHAT ARE THESE WHICH ARE ARRAYED IN WHITE ROBES ? AND WHENCE CAME THEY ? AND I SAID UNTO HIM, SIR, THOU KNOWEST. AND HE SAID TO ME, THESE ARE THEY WHICH CAME OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION, AND HAVE WASHED THEIR ROBES, AND MADE THEM WHITE IN THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB. THEREFORE ARE THEY BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD, AND SERVE HIM DAY AND NIGHT IN HIS TEMPLE : AND HE THAT SITTETH ON THE THRONE SHALL DWELL AMONG THEM. THEY SHALL HUNGER NO MORE, NEITHER THIRST ANY MORE ; NEITHER SHALL THE SUN LIGHT ON THEM, NOR ANY HEAT. FOR THE LAMB WHICH IS IN THE MIDST OF THE THRONE SHALL FEED THEM, AND SHALL LEAD THEM UNTO LIVING FOUNTAINS OF WATERS : AND GOD SHALL WIPE AWAY ALL TEARS FROM THEIR EYES.”—REV. VII. 9-17.

VISION OF THE WHITE-ROBED AND PALM-BEARING MULTITUDE.

THE Apostle has still another vision vouchsafed to him, previous to the opening of the seventh seal; it reveals the bliss of the perfected Church in glory.

In the preceding figuration (the sealing of the hundred and forty and four thousand), his eye had been directed to the terrestrial landscape, amid winds and trees, seas and tempests—the emblems of tribulation. Now he is in the midst of celestial scenery, surrounded by Throne and Temple, white robe and festal palm, the living fountains and pastures of the blessed. To the question which we have supposed must have suggested itself, after witnessing the vengeance-symbols, “What of the Church ?” the sealing-vision conveys the assurance of her imperishable security; that, despite of lightning and tempest, plague, pestilence and famine, battle, murder, and death, she will be preserved intact;—not a unit in her ranks wanting—not a name missing at the great roll-call;—that from all her troubles she will come forth “fair as the sun, clear as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners.” But the sublime imagery which we are now to ponder, tells far more than this. It assures not only of present immunity from destruction, but of a reversion of glory—a fulness of bliss

and joy, beyond what heart can conceive or tongue can utter. It opens up, once more, the glories of the Heaven already described to us in Chapter IV., and which will yet be more fully disclosed in the cluster of visions which terminate the Book. John not only sees God's seven thousand hidden in sheltering caves of safety—kept by 'the Angel of the Day-spring' from the avenging winds of judgment,—but the completed Church triumphant assembled in that calm world which lies beyond the reach of hurricane and storm—engaged with a brotherhood of angels in blessed ministries of love, in the presence of God and of the Lamb. If we described the language and scenery of the vision, on the opening of the sixth seal, as unsurpassed in Scripture for majesty and terror, we may well speak of the present as unique and peerless in a combination of beauty, tenderness, and grandeur. No wonder it is said of one of the most favoured children of genius—a true 'son of song'—to whom, however, the Bible was, alas ! in other respects, a sealed volume—that he could never refuse to drop a tear over this strain of heavenly minstrelsy.

Although it almost seems presumption to attempt to paraphrase the words, let us briefly rehearse the substance of the vision.

The Apostle beheld a great multitude (defying calculation), composed of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, standing before the Throne, and before the Lamb. In connection with these, a twofold emblem or characteristic specially attracted his attention—

the white robe in which they were attired, and the palms they held in their hands. The white robe cannot be other than the pure white garment of Christ's imputed righteousness, that in which He presents His ransomed people before the Throne, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. Tertullian and some of the Fathers, as well as some later writers, have taken the palm-branch as the Greek or Roman emblem of victory. This, however, is a misapplication of its significance and beauty. We have in a previous chapter noted, that the imagery of the Apocalypse, so far at least as its references to the Church are concerned, is never classical or Pagan, but exclusively Jewish ; we must, therefore, discover the true meaning of the palm-bearers, not amid the victors of Corinth and Olympus, nor in the Roman processions to the Capitol, but rather in connection with some expressive Hebrew rite or custom. This is not far to seek. However appropriate and expressive the references in Paul's Epistles may be to the games of ancient Greece (its races and wrestlings and garlanded victors), in illustration of the Christian conflict and triumph—far more beautiful, as emblematic of Heaven, and especially of Heaven's glorious *rest*, was the palm-bearing festal gathering of the Jews of old, the Feast of Tabernacles. That feast was the concluding one of the year, when the vines had surrendered their vintage, the olive-groves their berries,—when the garners of Palestine were full of all manner of store. It was the feast of ingathering,—the great 'harvest-home' of the nation ; designed, too, among other things (while celebrating the close of the agricultural

season, and the storing of the land's produce), to commemorate the tent-life of their forefathers in the desert, and specially, when these wanderings were over, their rest and settlement in the land of Canaan. It was a joyous, unrivalled holiday throughout the whole kingdom. All manual work was suspended. Even their dwellings were forsaken; and the memories of the desert were impressively revived, by constructing temporary booths, made of intertwined palm, olive, pine, myrtle, and "willows from the brook." During the continuance of the feast, the jubilant crowds carried in their hands, along the streets or public ways, branches of palm, accompanied with festal song. What more befitting imagery of the scenes and employments of the Heavenly Canaan, the land of everlasting rest? What more appropriate emblem, when the wilderness wanderings of all God's redeemed Israel had ceased, the Jordan crossed, and Canaan entered, "hungering no more," and "thirsting no more," the fierce sun not "lighting upon them," nor the sirocco "heat" of the desert,—than to represent them, not so much as conquerors with the emblems of victory (though that would have been appropriate also), but rather as keeping, through eternal ages, their Feast of Tabernacles,—waving their palm branches and singing their anthems of festive joy, crying with a loud voice, "Hosanna! salvation to our God." And not to anticipate the remaining portion of the vision, this antitypical similitude to the Feast of Tabernacles is still further carried out by a subsequent reference, where it is said, at the close of verse 15, "and He that sitteth on the

Throne shall *dwell* among them.” God Himself—the God of the eternal feast and the eternal rest—will Himself mingle with the festive throng ; and not only so, but (as the almost intransferrable meaning of the expression in the original may rather be rendered), “ He shall tabernacle among,” or “ spread His habitation over them.”* They shall each dwell in their separate booth of joy, and each wave their separate branch of triumph ; but therewill be a mightier Tent overcanopying all. The pillar-cloud of the desert, unlike the olden type, will follow them across the Jordan of death, and spread its brightness above the rejoicing myriads in the true Land of promise ;—they “ shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.” The beautiful imagery of the evangelical Prophet will obtain its grandest—its everlasting fulfilment—“ And the Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud of smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain.” The same magnificent simile is expanded in a future chapter of Revelation. “ And I heard a voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will ‘ tabernacle ’ with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God” (Rev. xxi. 3).†

* σκηνώσει ἐπ' αὐτούς.

† See Wetstein, Hengstenberg, and Alford, *in loc.* Also, on the emblem of the palm branches, see Trench, p. 113.

The cry of the palm-bearers is “Salvation!” (or more literally), “The Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.” “The Salvation,” and “our God.” They would disown any personal merit in entering upon the enjoyment of such bliss. Salvation, from first to last, they owe to sovereign grace and redeeming love ; their palm branches they would cast at the feet of the enthroned Mediator, saying, ‘Not unto us, not unto us, but unto Thee be all the glory.’ Moreover, “they cry* with a loud voice.” It is not a passing, fugitive strain, which had died away as they sang it ; but a never-ending ascription. In the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, the palm branches, green to-day, were withered to-morrow :—it was a scene of transient joy. But these are palms never fading ; robes ever lustrous ; songs never ceasing ; “the rest without a rest,” in the Heavenly Canaan.

After John had thus beheld “the sealed” of the former vision among the white-robed of the present—their safety and bliss secured and perpetuated—he is arrested by the adorations of a wider circle. The redeemed multitude were surrounded by all the unredeemed angels, who raise an antiphonal or responsive song. These stood “round about the throne, and about the elders, and the four living creatures ; and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen.” And then they added the sevenfold ascription of their perfected song (as it is in the more emphatic original), “The blessing, and the glory,

* So it has been noted, in all our oldest MSS.

and the wisdom, and the thanksgiving, and the honour, and the power, and the might, be unto our God for the ages of the ages." These angels—these ministering cherubim and seraphim—the "principalities and powers in heavenly places"—are thus represented as exulting in the bliss of the completed Church of the redeemed. "If even on earth there is said to be joy in heaven among the angels of God over *one* sinner that repenteth, how can they refrain from testifying their joy at the manifestation of God's glory in the final safety and well-being of His whole Church?"* If even the return of one wanderer from the fold creates a jubilee amid these unfallen ranks, what must be their joy, as they gaze on the whole in-gathered flock, the mighty multitude which no man can number? If even the restoration of one stone in the ruined temple is to them matter of lofty exultation, what must it be as they behold the vast spiritual edifice completed—"the top-stone brought forth with shouting," and the cry, "Grace, grace, unto it?"

But this beautiful vision revealed to John,—this brilliant interlude in the august drama,—is not concluded. As the song of these angels is still vibrating in his ears, one of the white-robed multitude seems to approach him; as if desirous, by prompting a question, to prolong the great words and thoughts of comfort, ere the curtain fall, and the spectator is once more back again amid vials and trumpet-soundings, voices and thunderings and lightnings and earthquake. "One of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are

* Hengstenberg.

arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?" The deferential reply was returned, "Sir" (or 'my Lord'), "thou knowest." And gathering from the Apostle's brief rejoinder that he desiderated further explanation, the interrogator proceeds, "And he said unto me, These are they which came out of great tribulation" (or, suppling the twice-repeated article, which is omitted in our translation, "the tribulation, the great tribulation"), "and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him by day and by night (heaven's emblem of perpetuity) in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall tabernacle among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat (or sirocco blast). For the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them (tend them or shepherd them*), and conduct them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes." Or, as our oldest translation, the Wicklif version, has it, "Shall lead forth them to the wells of the waters of life, and God shall wipe away each tear from the eyes of them."

We must defer, till next chapter, gathering the manifold lessons of hope and comfort which this wondrous vision supplies. Meanwhile let us ask the question, Are we preparing for the true heavenly Feast of tabernacles—the great reaping-day of glory? That well-known feast

* τροφαρεῖ.

and season in the land of Canaan was a joyous one of old, only to the Hebrew who had been unremitting in spring and summer toil. To the sluggard who had left his fields unsown, uncultured, untended, there could be no participation in the songs of the jubilant multitude: he had gone forth before the fall of the early or the latter rains, bearing no precious seed; he could not, therefore, on that festive week, come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. It was he who had used, with laborious fidelity and drudgery, spade and plough and pruning-hook, who had utilised for field and vineyard the precious rains of heaven, that would bear his palm-branch with most exultant joy, and repose with grateful satisfaction within his shady arbour. If there were no harvest-spoil to divide, there could be no gladness. "They joy before Thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil."

It is so, on a vaster scale, with the spiritual sower and reaper in the prospect of immortality. While we never dare lose sight of the foundation-truth of the gospel, that salvation is of grace, not of works; yet neither dare we reject or overlook the great counterpart assertion, which contains at least no paradox or inconsistency to the eye gifted with spiritual discernment, that "faith without works is dead, being alone." No waving of the festal palm, by those who have abandoned their fields of heart and life labour to the thorn and the thistle,—who have left the seed unsown, the ground untilled, the vine to languish; and whom God, the great Husbandman, will address with the withering words on the Great day of

harvest—"What could I have done more to my vineyard than I have done; wherefore, then, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" If we would have the joyous song of the heavenly reaper, we must now be among the faithful and diligent sowers. The rest of the Feast of tabernacles above, is only possible to such. No toil here,—no repose, no festal hosanna yonder. "Let us labour, therefore, to enter into that *rest*." Up! sow your fields and plant your vineyards; do noble work while you have space and opportunity to do it (in your own hearts and in the world around you) for God and His Christ, encouraged by the cheering assurance—"Be not weary in well-doing, for in due season ye shall reap if ye faint not." To all such willing and devoted labourers; to all who have listened to the summons of the Master, "Go, work in my vineyard;" to all who have done battle with sin, manfully struggled with temptation, eradicated from the seed-plot of the heart its roots of bitterness; who in a spirit of earnest self-sacrifice have renounced the world, and in a spirit of holy self-consecration and self-surrender have given themselves to God,—the invitation of Christ to the weary and heavy-laden here, will have a new and glorious significance as He welcomes them hereafter at Heaven's great harvest-home, the eternal Feast of tabernacles—"Come unto Me, I will give you REST!"



XIV.

The White Robes and Living
Fountains of Water.

"AND ONE OF THE ELDERS ANSWERED, SAYING UNTO ME, WHAT ARE THESE WHICH ARE ARRAYER IN WHITE ROBES ? AND WHENCE CAME THEY ? AND I SAID UNTO HIM, SIR, THOU KNOWEST. AND HE SAID TO ME, THESE ARE THEY WHICH CAME OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION, AND HAVE WASHED THEIR ROBES, AND MADE THEM WHITE IN THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB. THEREFORE ARE THEY BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD, AND SERVE HIM DAY AND NIGHT IN HIS TEMPLE : AND HE THAT SITTETH ON THE THRONE SHALL DWELL AMONG THEM. THEY SHALL HUNGER NO MORE, NEITHER THIRST ANY MORE ; NEITHER SHALL THE SUN LIGHT ON THEM, NOR ANY HEAT. FOR THE LAMB WHICH IS IN THE MIDST OF THE THRONE SHALL FEED THEM, AND SHALL LEAD THEM UNTO LIVING FOUNTAINS OF WATERS : AND GOD SHALL WIPE AWAY ALL TEARS FROM THEIR EYES."— REV. VII. 13-17.

THE WHITE ROBES AND LIVING FOUNTAINS OF WATER.

THESE beautiful verses (explanatory of the previous part of the vision) we were unable fully to overtake in the preceding chapter. They are more, however, than explanatory : they contain some new and precious unfoldings of the Heaven of the redeemed, which cannot be passed cursorily or in silence. After the preceding revelations of judgment and terror, how grateful and soothing to the Seer of Patmos must have been this lull in the storm—this bright though momentary glimpse through the midst of the tempestuous clouds ! The words must have fallen on his ear like serenest music. Let us, with him, enjoy the elevated calm. Laying aside the perplexities of interpretation and conflicting renderings which beset many other portions of the Book, let us, under the direction, not of human commentator, but of John's celestial guide, the member of the white-robed multitude—this Interpreter in the true “ Palace Beautiful ”—enter in spirit within the open door of the upper sanctuary. The passage is like a mirror set in eternity, in which the believer sees reflected his future character and condition. We all, beholding as in a glass our heavenly glory—are encouraged to look forward to the time when we shall

be changed into the same image from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord.

The verses unfold to us the former experience and condition of the Redeemed, under the twofold aspect of SIN and SUFFERING.

(1.) It was a condition of *sin*—“They washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” From the hour when Abel was admitted a solitary representative of the glorified Church, to the time when its voice shall become “as the voice of many waters and as the voice of mighty thunderings,” no human soul has ever passed, or ever can pass, within the gate into the City, that has not been stained with guilt. Every pillar in the Heavenly Temple is a ransomed pillar, bearing the inscription, “The chief of sinners, but I obtained mercy.” The whitest robe there was once soiled with pollution: the holiest and purest member of that redeemed family was once a rebel against the authority of the Being before whose throne he is casting his crown. What an encouragement, amid our struggles with temptation, the buffetings of Satan, our proneness to backsliding, our depressing consciousness of ever-present frailty and corruption, our defiant pride and hardened unbelief, that this “bright array” have had thus an identity of experience with ourselves,—that they have passed through the same “sloughs of despond,” been immured in the same dungeons of Doubting Castle, felt the same chains of corruption dragging them to the dust in spite of every effort to rise heavenwards,—reached their thrones and their

crowns covered with the scars of battle! They are now glorified witnesses to the fulness and freeness of the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. The Blood that ~~has~~ been so precious to them may be equally precious to us,—their robes may be our robes—their Heaven may be our Heaven—their God may be our God. The guiltiest there was not *too* guilty to be the recipient of one of these shining garments; and there cannot, therefore, be a sinner on earth too degraded or vile to listen to the Divine invitation—“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

But (2.) their past earthly condition was also one of *suffering*—“These are they which came out of great tribulation.” And in the conclusion of the verses we are led to infer something as to what this tribulation was. When we are told they are to “hunger no more, neither thirst any more,” it is equivalent to telling us, that once they hungered and thirsted, and fainted and groaned and were burdened. And in that most exquisitely tender of all Bible delineations of divine love, God ‘wiping away all tears from their eyes,’ we are informed that the place whence these Redeemed came was a weeping world, where every eye was once dimmed with tears.

God’s Word does not conceal, but, on the contrary, rather publishes and forewarns, that the road to Heaven is one of trial. Christ prepared His people for the highway thither being hedged with tribulation,—that if any would follow Him to the crown, it must be by the way of the cross. “Beloved,” says St Peter, “think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though

some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice." These trials are the ladder-steps by which the immortal spirits in this vision attained their bliss. We can almost imagine ourselves listening to their varied testimony. "God laid me," would be the experience and retrospect of one, "on a bed of sickness. I was living a life of engrossing worldliness. I was taking my health as a thing of course. I thought that the strong frame, and vigorous pulse, and undimmed eye, could never, in my case, be shattered or impaired. I had no thought of death;—eternity I put immeasurably away from me! He who gave me the abused talent stretched me on a couch of pain. Year after year I was familiarised with the dim night-lamp—the sleepless vigils—the aching head. Mine was the mournful monotonous soliloquy, 'Would God it were evening! would God it were morning!' But He allured me into the wilderness that He might speak comfortably unto me. I now praise Him for it all. Through the chinks of the battered earthly tabernacle were admitted the first rays of the heavenly glory. In the solitary night-watches my lips were first tuned for the heavenly song. Heart and flesh fainted and failed me, but my tribulation led me to Him who is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever."—"I was reposing in the sunshine of earthly prosperity," would be the testimony of another. "The fabled horn of plenty exhausted its ample stores in my lap. Riches increased; ah! I set my heart upon them; they filled my waking and sleeping hours; my closet, my Bible, my family, were sacrificed in the demon scramble. Life was a mad attempt to

refute and gainsay the great utterance of incarnate Truth—‘A man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth !’ At an unexpected moment the crash came :—the whole fabric of a lifetime (the *golden* fabric) fell to the ground. Seated amid empty coffers, and dismantled walls, and blighted hopes, I was led to bring the perishable into emphatic contrast with the eternal. I too thank my God for it all. But for that simoom-blast which swept over me, burying the hoarded treasures of a vain existence, I would have died the fool that I lived. But the loss of the gold which perisheth, led me to the unsearchable riches ; to lay up treasure beyond the reach of bankruptcy and the fluctuations of capricious fortune.”—“I was an idolater of my family,” another would tell. “I was leaning too fondly and tenderly on some cherished prop—some gourd in the earth-bower of my happiness. The prop gave way—the gourd withered. But as some gentle spirit (be it that of husband, or wife, or child, or brother, or sister) winged its flight to the realms of glory, it brought me, as I was never before, into near and holy contact with the Unseen. The tie snapped on earth bound me to the Throne of God :—voices from the celestial shore were heard saying, ‘Come up hither !’ I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Hence-forward my heart was where my garnered treasures were. And though every step of my saddened way was sprinkled with tears, every one of these were needful : I could not have wanted one of them ; the pangs and voids of the smitten spirit, of which they were the outward exponents, served to wean me from this poor world. These thorns

inserted in the earthly nest drove me to the wing, and suffered me not to stay my flight until I had reached the golden eaves of the Heavenly Home!"

While, however, we thus speak of the Redeemed as a tried and suffering band, we must not be misunderstood; as if we meant that their sorrows brought them there, and were the procuring causes of their white-washed robes and immortal bliss. No! Though these once weeping sufferers had wept an ocean of tears, that could not have wiped away the guilt of their sins. Observe, it is not 'These are they which came out of great tribulation,' *therefore* are they before the throne of God; but, 'These are they which have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' It is not the tribulation which saved them, but the Blood shed by the adorable Redeemer. Suffering of itself never can conduct to Heaven: the most fearful succession of trials can never certify to me that I am a child of God. It is only when affliction is sanctified that I can glory in it. In vain did the angel of old come down to Bethesda to "trouble the pool," unless the diseased afterwards stepped in. In vain does the Angel of sorrow come down to the Bethesda pool of the human heart to trouble it, unless the "troubling of the waters" be followed by "the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." "Affliction," it has been well said, "never leaves us as it finds us." We have only reason to rejoice in our tears, when they serve, not as, alas! is the case with many, only to dim our eyes more to unseen realities,—but rather, as the lenses of a telescope, to

bring nearer and more endearingly to view "the Better Country."

Let us pass to the other great topic these verses bring before us—*The History of the Heaven of the Redeemed*. They supply many interesting and suggestive thoughts.

(1.) *It is to be a state of perfect felicity.* This comprehends entire exemption from trial and complete freedom from sin; in other words, a beautiful combination of Holiness and Happiness. "Ye shall hunger no more!" There are there no more longings that cannot be satisfied—blanks that cannot be filled—shadows which mock the hand that would vainly grasp them. "Ye shall thirst no more!" Ye who have been wasting your strength on nature's broken cisterns and polluted streams, listen to this. "Thirst again," the attribute and characteristic of universal humanity, is unknown yonder,—where God Himself is revealed as the Fountain of Life, and where we shall drink of the rivers of His pleasures. "The sun shall not light upon you!" Here your journey is in a desert land; often you sigh in vain for shadowy palm or sheltering rock, to screen you from the scorching heat of affliction. In Heaven, that sun shall set to rise no more; and in its stead, God Himself is to rise on you; for "they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light." And it would seem from the glowing description, that this felicity, though it is to be perfect all at once in *kind*, is to be ever increasing in *degree*—a progressive felicity,

advancing with the years of eternity. The Lamb is represented as “*feeding them*,”—opening up new sources of enjoyment, affording new matter and new motive for praise, fresh views of His own glory, brighter displays of Redeeming love! “The Lamb shall lead them to living fountains of waters :” as if there was an insatiable longing in these Redeemed bosoms to know more of the Great salvation, every fresh draught only quickening their desire to drink deeper still. And it is “**THE LAMB**” that shall lead them and feed them. The *Lamb* and the *Fountain* are the too most precious words to the pilgrim in the wilderness, and they are precious still in the land of everlasting rest. Though in Heaven there is to be eternal freedom from sin and trial and suffering, the remembrance of these is not to cease. This, we found in a previous vision, is the song which the four and twenty Elders—the representatives of the redeemed—love to sing: “Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation :” ay, and these memories of sin and sorrow, so far from marring or interrupting, will rather quicken and intensify, the grateful praises of the ransomed myriads! “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes!” This tender and beautiful description would lead us also to infer that there will be a gradual opening and unfolding of the wisdom of God’s dealings with His people on earth, till the tear-drops of the wilderness, still lingering in their eyes, are all removed. Every providence will be cleared up, every dispensation vindicated. With an eye once full of tears now tearless, and a spirit

once repining now giving utterance to no murmur, every new morning will find the Redeemed reposing in serener confidence and with profounder and more restful love, on the God whose hand has obliterated the last trace of sorrow!

(2.) *It is to be a state of great glory.* That once-suffering but now triumphant multitude are represented as having their station nearest the throne—"They are *before* the throne," and He that sitteth upon the throne "*tabernacles among them.*" We have previously found, in verse 11th, the angels depicted as standing "*round about the throne and round about the Elders*" (the multitude of redeemed). This intimates the amazing fact, that it is ransomed sinners who occupy the inner circle around the throne—that it is they who are honoured with the nearest gaze of Deity. What a wondrous glimpse does this open to us of Heaven! to see angel and archangel giving way to the redeemed from the earth, to let the joint-heirs of Christ be partakers with Him on His Throne! We listen to the song of the entire multitude:—bright armies of unfallen angels,—principalities, and powers, gathered in to this august festival of the Lamb, headed by cherubim and seraphim. One theme thrills on every tongue; onward rolls the triumphant anthem, "*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.*" But these surrounding voices are at intervals silenced. From the one favoured band in the vision who are "*before the throne,*" with festal palms in their hands and blood-bought crowns on

their brows, there rises alone the chorus, “ He was slain for us !”

(3.) *God Himself is to constitute the essence of their enjoyment.* In all the beauteous and varied imagery in which these verses abound, the same grand idea is present in every clause. Is Heaven spoken of as a *Palace*, and He as a Sovereign seated on the throne? the Redeemed are represented as ranged before it, and the summit of their felicity attained, when it is said of them, “ Now are they before the Throne of God,” gazing on His unveiled majesty. Is Heaven described as a *Temple*, and the occupation of the Redeemed that of High Priests in the august Sanctuary?—still *He* is the supreme object of their worship—“ They serve *Him* day and night in His temple.” Again the figure is changed. These favoured citizens of the Heavenly Zion are pictured as a happy Flock reposing in the meadows of glory. But what would they be without the presence of their Shepherd? “ The Lamb that is in the midst of the Throne” shall tend them, feed them, guide them, fold them! Or do we behold them changing their posture of adoration, and going in search of the living fountains of waters? While yet they were inhabitants of earth, often were they seen in the attitude of pilgrims, “ coming up from the wilderness leaning on their Beloved.” Behold them now, coming up from the Throne; they are leaning on their Beloved still:—“ It is the Lamb who *leads* them.” It is a bold but fine conjecture of one of our great poets, when he is telling of the bright consummation of that “ Course of Time” of which he sang, that there are moments in Heaven when

the Redeemed around the Throne hush their voices and repair, as it were, amid the solitudes of eternity, to hold communion with God apart. But these words, from which the idea probably is derived, tell us that there is no such thing as absolute solitude in Heaven. The Ransomed may for a while lay aside their harps and retire from the company of angels amid the sequestered fountains of waters; but still they are not alone,—THE LAMB *leads* them and *feeds* them. Once more:—when, in the light of eternity, mysterious earthly dealings are cleared up, and dispensations vindicated, every tear removed,—the most touching part in this office of tenderness is the hand which wipes these tears away,—still it is God—“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” Yes! He is the light of Heaven—the central glory of that world of brightness. Tell what this world would be without the sun, and you can form some feeble idea of what Heaven would be to the Redeemed without HIM. There are many other powerful incentives to draw us to this world of glory. Departed friends who have fallen asleep in Jesus are there. Sacred are the voices which seem ever and anon to steal down in sweetest cadence—the soft whisper of Heaven’s own love—telling that though they cannot come to us, there is a blessed meeting-place in their own inheritance of light, which knows no parting. But in this vision of St John’s, there are no other or subordinate motives mentioned. The lesser rays are swallowed up in the glory that excelleth, and *God* is all in all!

Reader! if you are looking forward to taking your place as a worshipper in the upper Sanctuary, the same

Divine Being who will form the centre and focus of your bliss there, should form the centre and substance of your happiness here. Test the reality of your hopes by this. What is it that is drawing you to Heaven? Is it some dreamy indefinite idea of material splendour—a place of exemption from sorrow and suffering, where every wish is satisfied, and the very fountain of tears is dried? This may be, and doubtless will be, all true. But are its Mansions desirable, because they are the dwelling-place of your God? If at this moment it were denuded of all its other attractions, would it be enough to know “*God* shall be with them and be their God?” This was David’s Heaven—“I shall be satisfied when I awake in Thy likeness.” This was Asaph’s Heaven—“Whom have I in Heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee.” This was Paul’s Heaven—“Having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.” This was John’s Heaven—“It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” Yes! it is interesting specially to note, that to this mighty gazer of Patmos, to whom, in his apocalypse, had been revealed so many visions of dazzling beauty, Heaven consisted not in these,—not in scenery, nor in any outward elements of bliss; but that the essence of its happiness and glory was *likeness to God*,—serving *HIM* with a fervour that never wearies, and a love that knows no languor or decay.

What shall we say, then (as we sum up these observations), of this dwelling-place of God’s redeemed Israel—

this home of the Church-triumphant? Is there nothing in all its endless bliss to fire our ambition? Do the harpings of that innumerable multitude—these perennial fountains of water—these palms ever green—these thrones ever bright—the thoughts of sorrow ended—sufferings forgotten—tears wiped away—angels our companions—above all, of God Himself our everlasting Friend and portion—not urge us to break loose from the entralling chains of earth, and to feel as if there were nothing worth living for in comparison with this? It is said of Anaxagoras, the philosopher, that one night when in the act of studying the stars, his countrymen came to confer upon him an inheritance, in token of their appreciation of his genius. His reply was, “I wish it not—these heavens are my country.” Can we say the same in a grander, diviner sense? Are all earthly joys, and honours, and pleasures a bauble, compared with what faith unfolds in the splendours of immortality? Would that we might thus rise to the full realisation of that glorious heritage, to whose priceless blessings all can be served heirs through the blood of the Lamb. There are white robes for all—palms for all—crowns for all—Heaven for all. This vision is one of many chimes from the bells of Glory, gathering in the ransomed worshippers to the great festival. Let us listen to the summons. Let us be putting on now our festal garments, and prepare to take our place amid the rejoicing throng.

XV.

The Half-hour's Silence and Preparation for the Trumpet-soundings—
The Angel at the Golden Altar.

"AND WHEN HE HAD OPENED THE SEVENTH SEAL, THERE WAS SILENCE IN HEAVEN ABOUT THE SPACE OF HALF AN HOUR. AND I SAW THE SEVEN ANGELS WHICH STOOD BEFORE GOD ; AND TO THEM WERE GIVEN SEVEN TRUMPETS. AND ANOTHER ANGEL CAME AND STOOD AT THE ALTAR, HAVING A GOLDEN CENSER ; AND THERE WAS GIVEN UNTO HIM MUCH INCENSE, THAT HE SHOULD OFFER IT WITH THE PRAYERS OF ALL SAINTS UPON THE GOLDEN ALTAR WHICH WAS BEFORE THE THRONE. AND THE SMOKE OF THE INCENSE, WHICH CAME WITH THE PRAYERS OF THE SAINTS, ASCENDED UP BEFORE GOD OUT OF THE ANGEL'S HAND. AND THE ANGEL TOOK THE CENSER, AND FILLED IT WITH FIRE OF THE ALTAR, AND CAST IT INTO THE EARTH : AND THERE WERE VOICES, AND THUNDERINGS, AND LIGHTNINGS, AND AN EARTHQUAKE. AND THE SEVEN ANGELS, WHICH HAD THE SEVEN TRUMPETS, PREPARED THEMSELVES TO SOUND."—REV. VIII. 1-6.

THE HALF-HOUR'S SILENCE AND PREPARATION FOR THE TRUMPET-SOUNDINGS— THE ANGEL AT THE GOLDEN ALTAR.

It would have essentially contributed to a clear and intelligent apprehension of this passage, as well as of the structure of the entire Book, had the first verse in the present chapter formed the closing one of the preceding; or rather, had it taken a more distinctive place still, by forming the terminating words of the first of the three parallel visions of which the Apocalypse is composed. If we can venture again to use the simile which we have more than once employed in speaking of this portion of Scripture, viz., a prophetic drama in three acts, each act consisting in succession of the vision of the seals, the trumpets, and the vials,—then the opening verse would form the conclusion of the first great dramatic scene.

A significant interval takes place, before new figurations and personations present themselves to the Apostle-spectator;—“There was silence in Heaven about the space of half an hour.” It is the beautiful remark of Victorinus (one of the oldest commentators on the Revela-

tion) upon this half-hour's silence, that it denotes "the beginning of the saints' everlasting rest." * The idea is no doubt a sublime one, and more especially taken in connection with the antitypical reference, of which we have previously spoken, to the Feast of Tabernacles—the heavenly feast of *rest*—the beginning of "the rest which remaineth for the people of God." But we think a more natural meaning is that which we have just given, viz., to regard the words as simply marking the pause between the parts in the sacred representation. The Apostle is once more amid the familiar surroundings of Patmos. Stunned, or, to use a phrase of Chrysostom's, "made dizzy," with these revelations, he required a temporary relaxation from the tension of thought and feeling and strong emotion. Just as Zechariah, overpowered and exhausted with the glories of one of his prophetic visions, had sunk into slumber, so that the Angel that talked with him had to come again and "wake him as a man is wakened out of sleep" (Zech. iv. 1); or just as John's great Master, when on earth, required such a period of respite and suspension from prolonged bodily and mental toil, to satisfy the requirements of His humanity; †—so, on that memorable Lord's Day in Patmos there is a break in the imagery, in order that the favoured Apostle may enjoy a season of needed rest before the second great act in the apocalyptic drama opens, with its fresh revelations of the mysterious future.

The half-hour's silence being concluded, the curtain anew rises, and a fresh train of visions is disclosed. We

* Quoted by Alford, *in loc.* † Mark iv. 38; vi. 31; John iv. 6.

are not, however, to suppose that the vision of the trumpets and the trumpet-blowing angels (the new section on which we now enter) follows that of the seals chronologically. This could not be. The seals conducted us down to the end of the world, to the Day of judgment, and the very threshold of Heaven. If, therefore, the trumpets speak of earthly things, as they unquestionably do (the trees, the seas, the rivers, the lights of Heaven), they can only, under new phases—a new set of symbols with varying representations—traverse the same ground. Indeed we are constrained to regard the seals, the trumpets, the vials, as constituting a triple “correlative” series of visions, —a series not consecutive, but parallel, each embracing seven figurations, each complete in itself, each starting from the same point of departure (the commencement of the Christian era), each depicting the various fortunes of the Church, till these culminate in the triumphs of her great Head, the destruction of His adversaries, and the salvation of His people. This parallelism will be found to be accurate and complete. As the opening of the seventh seal indicated the beginning of heavenly bliss, so the blowing of the seventh trumpet similarly announces the completion of ‘the mystery of God,’ and is ushered in by a song of thanksgiving—by great voices in Heaven, saying, “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever. . . . And the temple of God was opened in Heaven” (Rev. xi. 15, 19). And so also is this harmony sustained in the pouring out of the seventh vial; for then we read,

“There came a great voice out of the temple of Heaven from the throne, saying, It is done.”*

Let us proceed, then, in profound reverence, to open this new volume of the great prophecy, and to follow, though with extreme brevity, this new train of revelations. The Apostle, refreshed after his half-hour's silence, is ready for the new invitation, “Come up hither.” The dull, commonplace scenery of his rocky home once more fades from view, and in a revived heavenly ecstacy, he waits his Saviour's summons.

Seven angels standing in the presence of God have had seven trumpets put into their hands. And here, too, we have preliminarily to note, that the parallelism and uniformity in the structure of the Apocalypse is still farther preserved. The reader will remember, that previous to the breaking of the seals, there was a sublime opening vision vouchsafed to the Apostle—a “glorious appearing” of Christ as the Mediator of His Church, under the strangely blended symbolism of the Lion and the Lamb, worshipped by ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands. This formed an august preparation—a grand prologue to the first section of the Book.

* “The first visions of the Apocalypse were displayed to the Evangelist on *the first day of the week*, the day of Christ's resurrection, the day of the coming of the Holy Ghost. . . . The prophetic visions of the seals and the trumpets are grouped in the two sets of *sevens*. They begin, as it were, with the *first day* of the week of the Church's existence, when she rose to new life in the resurrection of Christ; and they proceed, through a week of labour and suffering, till she comes to the Sabbath of her rest, and to the glorious octave of resurrection to immortality.”—BISHOP WORDSWORTH, *Introduction*, p. 148.

There is a similar preparatory vision or theophany before the sounding of the seven trumpets:—a similar glorious revelation of the Lord Jesus as the Great King and Head of His Church, to whose Divine will and pleasure these trumpet-angels are all subordinate and subservient; just, as we found, were the avenging angels of the winds in the chapter preceding. As the former preliminary vision was that of the God-man Mediator, and specially of “the Lamb,” as pointing to His atoning death and great propitiatory sacrifice, so now it is the same Divine Being, only symbolised as an Angel-priest engaged in the performance of His great intercessory work; standing (not now by the brazen altar of burnt-offering, at whose base we heard the “souls of the martyrs” uttering their cry), but by the golden Altar of incense in the Heavenly Temple. There He is represented as offering in “the golden censer filled with much incense, the prayers of all saints,” or rather, “all the saints”—the hundred and forty and four thousand mentioned in the sealing vision—the numerical symbol of completeness, and including, therefore, the entire multitude of the redeemed on earth.* It was a

* We take the interpretation of the vision as given by many reliable commentators, among these, Bede and Vitringa. The Angel-Intercessor, receiving and offering the prayers of the whole symbolised Church, is clearly beyond the capacity or functions of any mere created angel. Moreover, the priestly symbol is no new figuration, but only the reappearing of Christ under the emblem by which He is first presented to us in the opening of the Book (chap. i. 13). The same observations apply to the imagery regarding “the mighty angel,” in the beginning of chap. x. He is “clothed with a cloud,” the invariable emblem of Deity. The “rainbow upon his head,” “his face as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire,”

prelude-vision of glorious comfort to His servant and to the whole Church. Whether in the case of those gigantic persecutions which were more specially symbolised by the subsequent trumpet-soundings, or in the trials and tribulations of individual believers, there was a voice within the veil sending its word of consolation to every desponding spirit—"Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" (Luke xxii. 31, 32).

The Old Testament incense-offerings are associated with two very different occasions in the services of the Jewish Temple. Solemn and imposing must have been the scene on the great day of Atonement, when the Jewish high priest, divested of his wonted gorgeous robes, and habited in a pure white vestment, stood before the great brazen altar. After the preliminary sin-offerings and burnt-offerings for himself and for the nation had been presented, burning coals were taken by him from the altar and deposited in a golden censer. Carrying with him a handful of sweet incense, he proceeded within the curtain into the Holiest of all. As he stood in this august presence-chamber of Jehovah, he took a portion of it "beaten small," and cast it among the burning embers; the cloud enveloped the mercy-seat, the fumes filling the most Holy Place with grateful odours.

crying "with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth"—all equally identify Him with the august Being in the opening chapter, at whose feet John fell as one dead; whose countenance was as the sun shining in its strength, whose feet were like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters.

Similarly imposing must have been the scene which is more probably referred to here,—the daily offering of the incense by the ministering priest, morning and evening. Standing by the same great brazen altar, and placing, by means of a silver shovel, some live coals in his censer,—carrying at the same time a handful of frankincense, he advanced to the Golden altar in front of the veil which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. The whole of the congregation, during these solemn moments, preserved a profound silence. They remained outside engaged in devout prayer; as we read in connection with the ministration of Zecharias, “whose lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord,” that “the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense” (Luke i. 10). The priest on an appointed signal, after laying the censer on the golden altar, cast the incense on the fire, and the fragrant cloud ascended.

By combining these two interesting Temple memories, have we not, in this vision, strikingly brought before us the great Antitypical Priest, standing in the Heavenly Temple, receiving into His golden censer the prayers of His waiting people on earth? Perfuming them with the incense of His adorable merits, the grateful cloud ascends. The petitions of the Church throughout the whole world, individual and aggregate, rise with acceptance before the God of Sabaoth.

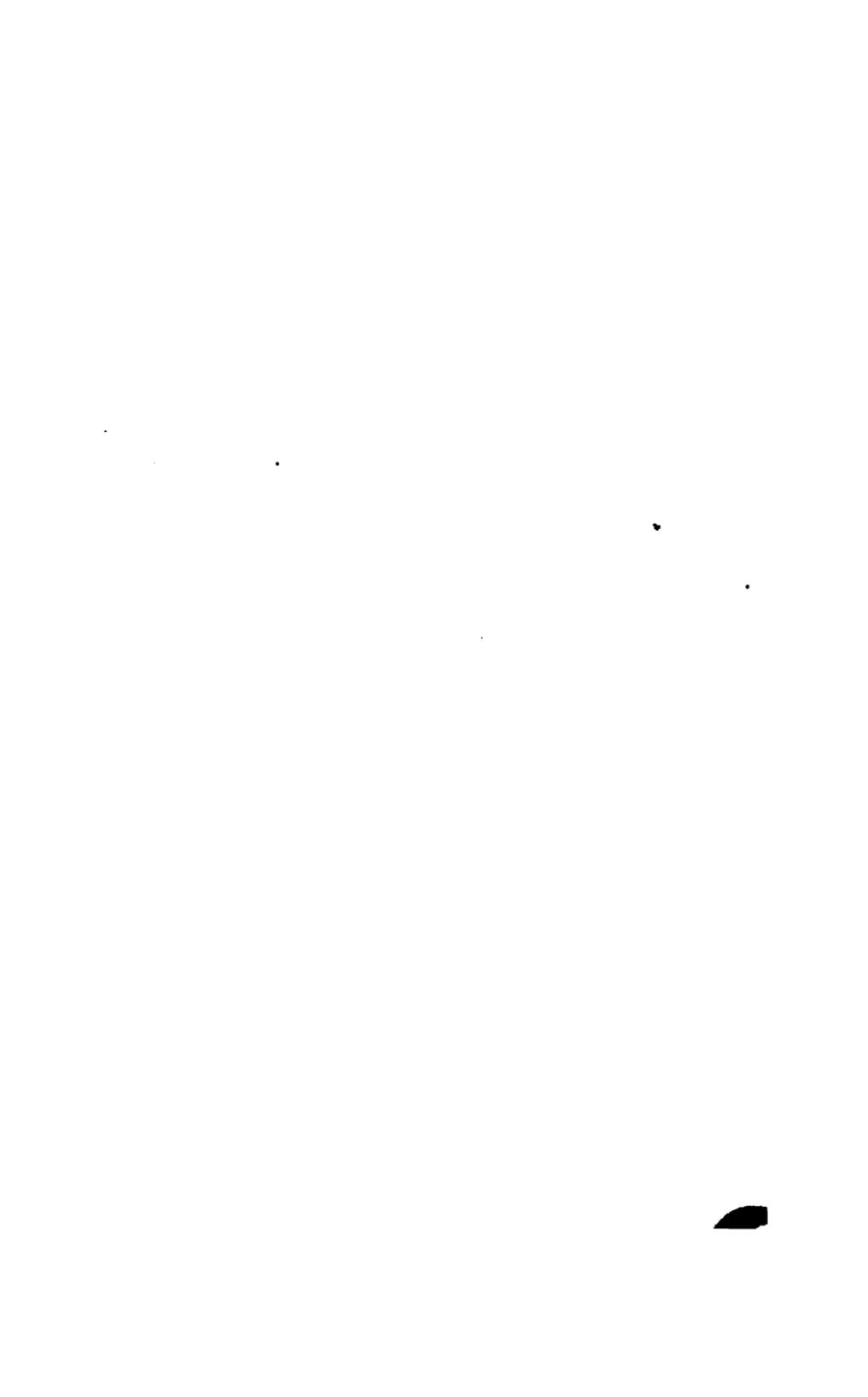
Let us pause for a moment by this consolatory vision. A vision of comfort it was intended to be for John and for the Church of his day; and it is designed to be

so also for us. The Angel-Intercessor revealed in Patmos is “that same Jesus,”—the same High Priest who stood in His lowly sacrificial attire beside the altar of burnt-offering on earth. The glowing embers of His own awful sacrifice He has carried within the veil—within the curtained splendour of the true Holy of Holies, and there, He ever liveth to make intercession. What an encouragement to prayer! Mark, they are the “prayers of *all* the saints” which are received into the censer, and incensed with the odour-breathing spices. The prayers not only of those ‘strong in faith giving glory to God,’ but the prayers also of the lowliest, the humblest, the weakest—the tremulous aspirations of the penitent, the lisping stammerings of infancy; the prayer of the palace amid fretted ceilings and gilded walls; the prayer of the cottage, where the earthen floor is knelt upon, and where the only, although, after all, the noblest altar is that of the lowly heart, and the purest sacrifice that of the broken spirit; the prayer ascending from the time-honoured sanctuary and ‘the great congregation;’ the prayer rising in the midst of the silent desert, or from the voyager on the lonely sea. Poor and utterly unworthy as these petitions may be in themselves, they are perfumed by the fragrant merits of the Covenant-Intercessor. They are made acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. His pleading voice is never heard in vain. No variety can bewilder Him. He can receive all, and attend to all, and answer all. The glowing coals in His censer are feeble emblems of the burning love which glows in His heart. Penitence can still go, as of old, to His feet, to pour out

in silent tears the tale of sadness. Sorrow can still rush, as of old, with throbbing emotion, and cry out, in His own words as the Prince of Sufferers, "If it be possible let this cup pass." The hand of faith can still touch the hem of His garment, and the voice of faith still utter its cry, "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me!"

And as the "all saints" spoken of here, refer, in the first instance, to those who, in the time of John, lived amid trumpet-soundings and vials (times of judgment and persecution), so is this vision specially precious and comforting to all the children of affliction. It is in the season of trial and sorrow Jesus lends most lovingly His ear to hear His people's voice. It is 'songs in the night' He most delights to listen to. It is prayers, if we may so speak, saturated with tears, He loves best to put into His censer. It was the express Divine injunction regarding the daily incense-offering in the Temple-service of which we have spoken, that on the lighting of the lamps '*at even*,' Aaron was to burn sweet incense on the Golden altar. Afflicted believers! it is so still. "*At even*," when the bright world is shaded,—when the flowers have closed their cups,—when the song of bird has ceased, and the sun of your earthly bliss has gone down in the western sky,—then it is that the lamp of Prayer is kindled in the soul's temple. Yes! just when other lamps that have lighted your pilgrimage pathway are quenched in darkness, prayer lights its lone lamp in the heart's deserted sanctuary. It was amid the darkness of the night, at the brook Jabbok, that Jacob wrestled of

old with the angel and prevailed. It is in the soul's dark and lonely and solitary seasons still, that the Church's moral and spiritual wrestlers are crowned with victory, and as princes "have power with God!"



XVI.

The Casting of the Altar-fire on the Earth; the Sounding of the Seven Trumpets; and the Closing Vision and Song.

“AND THE ANGEL TOOK THE CENSER, AND FILLED IT WITH FIRE OF THE ALTAR, AND CAST IT INTO THE EARTH: AND THERE WERE VOICES, AND THUNDERINGS, AND LIGHTNINGS, AND AN EARTHQUAKE. AND THE SEVEN ANGELS, WHICH HAD THE SEVEN TRUMPETS, PREPARED THEMSELVES TO SOUND. . . . AND THE SEVENTH ANGEL SOUNDED; AND THERE WERE GREAT VOICES IN HEAVEN, SAYING, THE KINGDOMS OF THIS WORLD ARE BECOME THE KINGDOMS OF OUR LORD, AND OF HIS CHRIST; AND HE SHALL REIGN FOR EVER AND EVER. AND THE FOUR-AND-TWENTY ELDERS, WHICH SAT BEFORE GOD ON THEIR SEATS, FELL UPON THEIR FACES, AND WORSHIPPED GOD, SAYING, WE GIVE THEE THANKS, O LORD GOD ALMIGHTY, WHICH ART, AND WAST, AND ART TO COME; BECAUSE THOU HAST TAKEN TO THEE THY GREAT POWER, AND HAST REIGNED. . . . AND THE TEMPLE OF GOD WAS OPENED IN HEAVEN, AND THERE WAS SEEN IN HIS TEMPLE THE ARK OF HIS TESTAMENT: AND THERE WERE LIGHTNINGS, AND VOICES, AND THUNDERINGS, AND AN EARTHQUAKE, AND GREAT HAIL.”
—REV. VIII. 5, 6; XI. 15, 16, 17, 19.

THE CASTING OF THE ALTAR-FIRE ON THE EARTH: THE SOUNDING OF THE SEVEN TRUMPETS: AND THE CLOSING VISION AND SONG.

In the previous chapter, we considered the beautiful vision of the Angel-Intercessor standing by the golden altar of incense;—a vision conveying so many lessons of consolation and encouragement. The prayers of the hundred and forty and four thousand are received into His censer. There is room there for all; from the petitions of the lisping child or trembling penitent, to those of the full-grown saint in the manhood of his spiritual being. The hands of this true Moses on the Heavenly Mount never grow weary, and the omnipotent “Father, I will” is never uttered in vain.

But while the vision has its message of unspeakable comfort to the believer, it has its utterances also of solemn warning to the sinner and to the world; for we read, that immediately subsequent to the reception of the prayers of the saints, the same Angel-Priest “took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it on the earth; and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.” This imagery calls to mind the same vision of Ezekiel to which we formerly had occasion to refer, wherein “the

man clothed in linen" was commanded to "go in between the wheels under the cherub, and fill his hand with coals of fire from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city" (Ex. x. 2). In both cases we have the unmistakable symbols of judgment. The hot ashes, thrown by the very hand that had just been revealed as 'strong to save,' indicated that to "the fearful and un-believing" His arm was 'strong to smite.' These glowing coals, if they mingle not with the prayer-offering of the saints, will be cast forth amid despisers and scorers. The fire which does not purify, will, as in the case of Nadab and Abihu, destroy and consume. Where shall the prayerless—those who have never cast one offering into the censer—be found on that day when the Lord shall make inquisition? "Their drink-offerings of blood," says the Saviour they have rejected, "will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips."

Ye who have never known what it is to bend the knee in prayer, who are now living on with no interest in the intercession of Christ—no part in these angel-pleadings, think how you will be able to confront on that day an injured Saviour, when He addresses you in the words He spake to Philip of old, "Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known Me?" Have I been with you so long in the preaching of My Word; in ordinances, in sacraments, in afflictions, in the Patmos-chamber of sickness, at deathbed scenes, at the solemn grave,—and yet, has My golden censer not received one solitary petition, has no breathing of thine ever helped to load the incense-cloud? Go to the unfrequented

chamber; let the untrodden way to the mercy-seat be no longer choked with the rank weeds of forgetfulness. Let it be henceforth a beaten path. As the Divine Aaron this night lights the lamps—kindles the altar-fires in the upper sanctuary, let there be altar-fires on earth too, kindled for the first time,—let angels carry the glad tidings to Heaven, “Behold he prayeth !”

Let us pass now to a few observations on the vision of *the Seven Trumpets*. These Apocalyptic trumpets evidently do not refer to the silver trumpets used on the great festival which bears the name. These latter summoned to a joyous celebration, corresponding (as has been supposed from its date in the Jewish calendar, as “the beginning of months”), to our own New Year’s day. It was to the Jew the anniversary festival of the world’s ‘genesis.’ Trumpets emitting jubilant notes, were appropriately employed in memory of the glad occasion when “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy:” it formed a prelude and preparation also, for the most sacred of their convocations, the great day of Atonement. But the trumpet, to the Hebrew of old, had other and different associations. It was wont to sound the alarm of war, or to be blown by the sentinels on their cities’ watch-towers, when the enemy was in sight or danger was at hand. The present symbolic soundings have a similar reference; they are premonitory of battle and conflict, the precursors of judgment. As the vision of the Seals was designed to minister to the comfort of the Church in the midst of

her trials, by the assurance of her ultimate deliverance and safety ; so the vision of the Trumpets immediately succeeding, was intended to be prophetic of God's judgments on the Church's enemies, and the certainty with which that punishment is to overtake them. As a commentator has well observed, 'the moral of the seven seals is, " Say ye to the *righteous* it shall be *well with him*; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings." The moral of the seven trumpets is, " Woe unto the *wicked*; it shall be *ill with him*, for the reward of his hands shall be given him " (Is. iii. 2).'

All commentators, from the earliest to the latest,* have with singular unanimity pointed out the evident allusion in these apocalyptic trumpet-blowings to the occasion of the siege of Jericho on the entrance of Israel into the land of Canaan. Numerically, as well as otherwise, the resemblance is remarkable. On seven successive days was the Canaanitish stronghold to be compassed by the armies of Israel. Trumpets were to sound as the desert warriors marched round the walls, preceded by the Ark of the Covenant—the token of the Divine presence. And when we remember the seven vials, which in the Book of Revelation follow the seven trumpets, we are forcibly reminded of the special additional injunction regarding Jericho, that on the seventh day of the seven trumpet-blowings there was to be a sevenfold compassing of the city ; and that not till the seventh circuit was completed and "a long blast" was given with the rams' horns, accompanied with "a great shout," were the

* See Elliot *in loc.*

gigantic walls to fall and the conquest obtained of this key to Palestine. The whole of the Apocalypse may be regarded as a New Testament and gospel history of the march of the true Israel through the successive stages of the world's long wilderness, to the heavenly Land of Promise. It is a history of gradual aggression against the powers of evil ; the triumph of the true Joshua-Jesus over all His adversaries, until He has secured for His people permanent rest within the celestial Canaan. And as the siege and conquest of Jericho presented to the Hebrews alike a vivid memorial and rehearsal of their long struggles and a pledge of final victory ; so it forms no unbefitting type and picture of the greater and more glorious struggle, with its ultimate triumph and rest, which belongs to the Church of God. The whole history of the Church, as embraced in the Revelations, is a history of the siege of a moral Jericho—the compassing of the walls of the world's giant unbelief, and their final fall before the might of Him, of whose glorious Person and presence the ancient Ark of Israel was the significant type. Trumpet after trumpet sounds its judgment-blast, each separate peal is directed with symbolic import against some department or element of outer nature,—the earth, with its trees and green grass ; the sea, into which plunges a mountain burning with fire ; the rivers and fountains of waters, poisoned with a falling meteor ; the luminaries of heaven, sun, moon, and stars, smitten with darkness. As the Apostle in the previous sealing-vision had obtained the pledge of Israel's security, the Church's ultimate safety and triumph ; so, through this

new series of symbols, he receives the pledge and assurance of God's judgments on an unbelieving world—the overturn and destruction of every citadel and bulwark of evil which has hitherto opposed the triumph of truth. The progress of the siege is necessarily slow. It may be seven compassings and yet seven again. The faith and the patience of the true Israel is sorely tried, as they cry aloud in the anguish of hope deferred, "Lord, how long?" The scoffers on the battlements seem to hurl their taunts and missiles with impunity;—no rent is seen in the walls, no premonitory symptoms of a breach. But come it will. Since John stood in Patmos, many circuits have been completed; many a time have these herald-angels, in the past history of Christendom and of the world, sounded their martial trumpets; nation has risen against nation and kingdom against kingdom; every fresh blast, every fresh mustering of the hosts for the battle;—every startling calamity—the famine, the pestilence, the fall of the Siloam-tower, the storm which has strewn the coast with wrecks and filled desolate hearts with agony—all these tell of the nearer approach to the grand consummation, when 'the shout of the people,' the cry of united Israel—the prayers of the true Church of God, now ascending apparently in vain—will obtain the expected response in a voice from Heaven, saying, "It is done!"

In the midst, then, of these very judgments which now passed before the eye of John,—amid these trumpet-peals which carried the sound of woe to the guilty world, there were blended notes of comfort and encouragement to every drooping, desponding spirit. The triumph of truth

might be chequered, but it would be sure and complete. As in the case of Jericho, “our weapons are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.” Human might and human power can do nothing in themselves against the bulwarks of evil. “We have no might against this great multitude, neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon Thee.” “Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward.” “Stand ye still, and see the salvation of God.” “For He bringeth down them that dwell on high; the lofty city He layeth it low, He layeth it low even to the ground, He bringeth it even to the dust.” “The right hand of the Lord is exalted, the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly.” “The haughtiness of man shall be laid low, and the Lord alone shall be exalted on that day.” As of the type, so of the antitype will it be in due time said and sung: “*By faith* the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about many days.”

We may even carry further the resemblance to this old story of Israel’s border city;—connecting it with the reference which we have previously pointed out in the palm-bearing vision, to the Feast of Tabernacles. That feast, among the other incidents it commemorated, embraced that of the siege of Jericho. For we are told that during its continuance, a procession, bearing branches of palm, accompanied with the sound of trumpets, entered the courts of the temple for seven successive days; and that, on the seventh day, they compassed seven times the altar with the same trumpet-blowings, singing their Hosanna.*

* See Horne’s “Introduction.”

At the true Feast of Tabernacles in the Heavenly Temple, when the redeemed enter on their everlasting bliss and everlasting rest, they will be able to commemorate, with triumph, their toilsome struggles, their long marches around the defiant walls of earth's unbelief, when they had nothing but faith to sustain the assurance of ultimate victory.

And as a befitting termination of this necessarily rapid and cursory reference to the trumpet-visions, let us only farther note the closing picture given under the sounding of the seventh Angel. "The temple of God was opened in Heaven" (Rev. xi. 19). The impenetrable veil which screens from mortal sight the mysteries of that true "Holiest of all," was for the moment drawn aside. And what is the disclosure made to the eye of the Apostle? It is another old memory of Jericho, more sacred even than its trumpets. There was seen in this Temple '*the Ark of His testament.*' Glorious and comforting vision wherewith to terminate all these terrific trumpet-soundings—these symbols of wrath and judgment—the voices of lightnings and thunders! The walls of the world's Jericho have fallen—its bulwarks are demolished, and Israel's possession of the better Canaan is secured. But, as if to remind John, and to remind the Church in every age, of the secret of all her past victories, and to give her the pledge of her eternal rest, he gazes on the familiar symbol so often and so long associated with the fortunes and the history of the Hebrew people—the palladium of their liberties—the rallying-point in every hour of disaster; but which had now to him a still deeper and holier significance as the

type of the Great Propitiatory—the true Covenant Ark. In the glories of His Divine person and the fulness of His mediatorial work, Jesus is set in the Heavenly Temple, the pledge and guarantee of eternal safety and peace to the Church purchased with His blood. “ Because I live ye shall live also.”

In the same closing vision, the twenty-four Elders—the symbolic representatives of the whole Church of the redeemed—are farther pictured as falling down on their faces in an act of supreme adoration, and breaking forth in one glorious ascription, saying, “ We give Thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art and wast.” Our version has added, “ and art to come.” It is remarkable, however, that these words, familiar to us in more than one previous doxology of this Book (i. 4, 5; iv. 8) are not found in this place in any of the older MSS. They are more than probably interpolated.* But by omitting them, the passage becomes in truer and more beautiful accord with the time of the vision and its position in the figurations. Heaven has begun. The “ *art to come* ” would be a redundancy and anachronism in that heavenly song; for the advent of Him who was previously described as “ He who *cometh* ” was now an accomplished fact. Therefore this new Divine ascription, as it stands in the most numerous and authentic versions, is more appropriately as follows:—“ We give Thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art and wast; because Thou hast taken to Thee Thy great power and hast reigned.”

Be it ours, meanwhile, patiently to wait such an assured

* See Hengstenberg and Alford *in loc.*

and glorious consummation ; “ looking for, and hastening unto, the coming of the day of God.” Let us take our festal palm-branch and follow the pealing trumpets—trumpets of joy to the Church, trumpets of woe and judgment to the world. The seventh Angel not having yet sounded, let us raise our Hosanna—the “ COME, LORD JESUS,”—the reiterated key-note of the Book, with its divine harmonies. “ Yet a little while and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.” “ The trumpet *shall* sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible.” “ The coming of the Lord draweth nigh.” The downfall of the world’s antichristian powers—the destruction of its moral Jerichos—will be coincident with this great event, for which all creation longs. May He who holds the seven-sealed roll in His hand hasten the day, when the last trumpet voice shall be heard, and the last shout of prayer ascend, “ Thy kingdom come !”—bringing the glad response, ushering in the longed-for moment and announcement, “ The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign to the ages of the ages ! ”



XVII.

The Lamb standing on Mount Zion,
with the Hundred and Forty and
four Thousand.

"AND I LOOKED, AND, LO, A LAMB STOOD ON THE MOUNT ZION, AND WITH HIM AN HUNDRED FORTY AND FOUR THOUSAND, HAVING HIS FATHER'S NAME WRITTEN IN THEIR FOREHEADS. AND I HEARD A VOICE FROM HEAVEN, AS THE VOICE OF MANY WATERS, AND AS THE VOICE OF A GREAT THUNDER; AND I HEARD THE VOICE OF HARPERS HARPING WITH THEIR HARPS: AND THEY SUNG AS IT WERE A NEW SONG BEFORE THE THRONE, AND BEFORE THE FOUR BEASTS, AND THE ELDERS: AND NO MAN COULD LEARN THAT SONG BUT THE HUNDRED AND FORTY AND FOUR THOUSAND, WHICH WERE REDEEMED FROM THE EARTH. THESE ARE THEY WHICH WERE NOT DEFILED WITH WOMEN; FOR THEY ARE VIRGINS. THESE ARE THEY WHICH FOLLOW THE LAMB WHITHERSOEVER HE GOETH. THESE WERE REDEEMED FROM AMONG MEN, BEING THE FIRST-FRUTTS UNTO GOD AND TO THE LAMB. AND IN THEIR MOUTH WAS FOUND NO GUILE: FOR THEY ARE WITHOUT FAULT BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD."—REV. XIV. 1-5.

THE LAMB STANDING ON MOUNT ZION WITH THE HUNDRED AND FORTY AND FOUR THOUSAND.

IN entering on these 'memories' of John's great Words and Visions, we stated that it would be alike unprofitable and uninteresting to attempt investigating many portions of the Apocalypse which have formed the battle-ground of rival interpreters and conflicting interpretations ; and that we should confine ourselves to those which are alike more perspicuous in meaning and replete with practical instruction. It was for this reason we passed so cursorily in our last, the details of the first six trumpet-soundings. We simply alluded, indeed, to the first four of these, which had reference to God's judgments on the outer world, on the trees, the sea, the rivers, the lights of heaven. The fifth and sixth trumpets were not even mentioned. They referred to the outpouring of the Divine judgments, not on material nature, but on living men ; and consisted of the plague of the locusts and the plague of the horsemen. Without attempting to dwell on circumstantial, but simply to preserve continuity, we may link together in a few sentences the intervening portions, occupying, as they do, four chapters between the sixth trumpet-sounding and the beautiful passage which opens upon us

like a welcome gleam of heavenly sunshine in chapter 14th.

At the close of the sixth trumpet there is inserted a twofold vision—that of the mighty Angel holding in his hand “the little Book,” and of “the two Witnesses” prophesying in sackcloth. Then comes the sounding of the seventh Angel’s trumpet, to which we have already particularly alluded. It evoked a song of triumph from the lips of Christ’s ingathered Church. Heaven was opened, and a disclosure made of “the Ark of his Testament,” the pledge and symbol of the inviolable security of the glorified. The special theme of their song, however—the first outburst of praise on this birthday of the Church-triumphant, being an ascription of thanksgiving for the completion of God’s righteous judgments on the *world*,—the symbols of bliss and joy were appropriately accompanied with “lightnings, and voices, and thun-
dings, and an earthquake, and great hail.”

With this imagery concludes another great act in the apocalyptic drama. Yet, ere the curtain falls, and before the terminating scenes, in the outpouring of the seven vials, take place, there is inserted a lengthened interlude—a great prophetic vision, complete in itself—regarding the Church and her three enemies. The Church is represented as a Woman arrayed in dazzling effulgence. The light of the midday sun is her vesture; the moon (probably the crescent moon) is under her feet, forming her sandals; and around her head is a tiara or coronal of twelve stars, recalling the description in the Song of Songs, “Who is she that looketh forth as the morning?

Fair as the moon, bright as the sun, and terrible as a starry host with banners.”* She is further depicted as fleeing into the wilderness, pursued and persecuted by a portentous monster—a great red Dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and a cluster of seven crowns on his head. This we are specially told was Satan himself, the Prince of Darkness, the arch-enemy of the Church and of mankind,—“That old serpent which deceiveth the whole world” (xii. 9). Evicted by Michael and his angels from the highest heavens, the dragon and his angels are represented as turning their foiled and baffled rage against the Woman, and “making war with the remnant of her seed” (xii. 17). But the exiled and persecuted Church is shielded from the rage of the destroyer. Eagle-wings are given her to fly farther still into the recesses of the wilderness, where, like the great Prophet of Cherith, “She is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent” (xii. 14).

Again, as the Apostle-spectator stands on the sands of Patmos, the *Æ*gean waves rolling at his feet (xiii. 1), he sees emerging from the bosom of the deep, another hideous monster, somewhat akin and yet differing from the former. This new fiendish incarnation has seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy” (xiii. 1). These heads and horns are the well-known symbols of world-power; and though evidently referring, in the first instance, to the colossal dominion of the Roman Empire, which, in the time of St John, had from its Capitol on the Tiber

* See Elliot *in loc.*

carried winged thunderbolts wide over the earth ; yet they are by no means restricted to this ; but may rather be regarded as representative of all the vast earthly empires which are hostile to Christ and His Church. To this sea-monster Satan surrenders his throne and kingdom, making him his substitute and viceroy ; and terribly does the delegate fulfil the commission by his blaspheming tongue and his war with the saints (xiii. 6, 7).

Once more, John beholds another—a third Beast—rising now, not from the sea, but from the earth : one of hybrid form, half lamb, half dragon ; yet an emissary of the abyss and darkness, and confederate with the sea-born monster,—wearing a pretended gentleness and lamb-like meekness, combined with the dragon's subtlety, cruelty, and mischief,—a giant deceiver, doing great wonders, performing false miracles, and arrogantly exacting homage from “them which dwell on the earth.” This has been generally supposed (however interpretations may conflict in details) to represent that gigantic sacerdotal ascendancy, in all its varied phases and protean shapes, first Pagan then Christian, but which has attained its culmination in the persecuting power and tyrannical usurpation of the Church of Rome,—that hybrid of simulated meekness and humility, the gentleness of the lamb in combination with haughty pretension and cruel intolerance,—the washer of pilgrims' feet, yet the kindler of Inquisition-fires—the disposer of crowns and kingdoms—the arch-ruler of men—the Vicar of God ! While the previous sea-monster was the representative of brute force,

secular despotism, the tyranny of sword and conquest, of dungeon, and rack, and faggot,—this latter is that of ecclesiastical despotism, going forth among the nations with all deceivableness of unrighteousness,—its weapons moral and spiritual,—its subject and crouching victims, the depraved intellect, the enslaved conscience, the distorted reason, the fettered will. We are reminded of the description which the great Dreamer, in his “Pilgrim’s Progress” puts into the lips of Christian when in the Valley of the Shadow of Death :—“ While I was musing, I espied before me a cave, where two giants, Pope and Pagan, dwelt in old times, by whose power and tyranny the men whose bones, blood, ashes, and mangled bodies lay there, were cruelly put to death.”

But in this mystic Book, vision is interlaced and supplemented with vision. And as we have just described that of the Woman and her three enemies as an appendage to the seven trumpet-soundings preceding the opening of the vials, so the figuration which we are now more specially to consider, forms an epilogue or addition to this interjected imagery ; while it constitutes also a befitting introduction to the scenes of final triumph and final vengeance which occupy the last chapters of the Apocalypse. The preceding revelations, so full of woe and sadness, were calculated to depress and overwhelm the spirit of the Apostle. The present is, as if a telescope were put into his hands, enabling him to pierce the environing gloom, and obtain the assurance of ultimate safety; or, to use the simile suggested by the wilderness whither the persecuted Church had fled, as if an oasis had sud-

XII.

The Vision of the Sealed.

"AND AFTER THESE THINGS I SAW FOUR ANGELS STANDING ON CORNERS OF THE EARTH, HOLDING THE FOUR WINDS OF THAT THE WIND SHOULD NOT BLOW ON THE EARTH, NOR ON ANY TREE. AND I SAW ANOTHER ANGEL ASCENDING EAST, HAVING THE SEAL OF THE LIVING GOD: AND HE CRIED A LOUD VOICE TO THE FOUR ANGELS, TO WHOM IT WAS GIVEN TO EARTH AND THE SEA, SAYING, HURT NOT THE EARTH, NEITHER THE TREES, TILL WE HAVE SEALED THE SERVANTS OF THEIR FOREHEADS. AND I HEARD THE NUMBER OF THEM WHO WERE SEALED: AND THERE WERE SEALED AN HUNDRED AND FORTY THOUSANDS OF ALL THE TRIBES OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL. OF THE TRIBE OF JUDA WERE SEALED TWELVE THOUSAND. OF THE TRIBE OF REUBEN WERE SEALED TWELVE THOUSAND. OF THE TRIBE OF ASER WERE SEALED TWELVE THOUSAND. OF THE TRIBE OF NEPHALIM WERE SEALED TWELVE THOUSAND. OF THE TRIBE OF MANASSES WERE SEALED TWELVE THOUSAND. OF THE TRIBE OF SIMEON WERE SEALED TWELVE THOUSAND. OF THE TRIBE OF LEVI WERE SEALED TWELVE THOUSAND. OF THE TRIBE OF ISSACHAR WERE SEALED TWELVE THOUSAND. OF THE TRIBE OF ZABULON WERE SEALED TWELVE THOUSAND. OF THE TRIBE OF BENJAMIN WERE SEALED TWELVE THOUSAND. OF THE TRIBE OF DAN WERE SEALED TWELVE THOUSAND."—REV. VII. 1-8.

denly been opened up to him in the midst of the desert, with its wells and palm-trees, telling of welcome refreshment and shade.

Perhaps the darkest part of the whole Apocalypse had now been reached. The very heaven above, which, at the opening of the Book, was radiant with visions of surpassing glory and resonant with song, brings before the mind recent memories of conflict and the clang of battle. “There was war in Heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels.” The final expulsion of the Great Enemy from the heavenly world seems to have been, in some mysterious way, connected with the completion of Christ’s Redemption-work on earth. “Now,” says the true Michael, (“the Great Prince that standeth for the children of his people” (Dan. xii. 1),—the “Man-child” of the prophetic vision, “caught up unto God, and to His Throne” (xii. 5),)—“Now,” says He, in anticipation of His ascension, “shall the Prince of this world be cast out.” “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from Heaven.” The same event had thus been celebrated in prophetic strains: “Thou hast ascended on high; Thou hast led captive multitudes captive.”* And when that war was hushed, and the battle turned from the celestial gates, it was only, as we have noted, for the discomfited legions to make earth the scene of their renewed unholy strife. If these judgments on the Church had been the disciplinary chastisements of her Great Head, John would have bowed with unfalter-

* See this fully discussed by Hengstenberg; also his satisfactory identification of Michael with the Lord Jesus Christ.

ing trust. But it was a fearful brotherhood and confederacy he beheld of the powers of human and satanic evil—a compound of brute force and demon force; man, the tool and instrument of hellish impulses, raging against the Lord and His Anointed. Satan was marshalling the hosts of evil men; and from these duped, malignant human agents the appeal was heard, “Who is like unto the Beast? who is able to make war with him?” Well might the trembling Apostle exclaim, in words uttered by David in a kindred hour of terror and despondency, “Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for His mercies are great, and let me not fall into the hands of man.”

It was, then, amid such gloomy picturings that the Patmos-exile turned his eye from sea and earth and wilderness, to the already well-known emblems of the Lamb, the four Living ones, the Elders, the Throne, the Hundred and forty and four thousand. It deserves, moreover, specially to be noted, in connection with the vision, that it is not to be taken as a picture of the Heaven that is hereafter to be—the Heaven of the completed Church-triumphant (*that* is reserved for future revelations, which we shall come by and bye to consider); it is rather the Heaven of the present—the calm world that now exists, when the earthly battle is still raging, and the lower horizon is still black with tempests.

The first object in this new scene which arrests John’s attention is his beloved Saviour,—the great King and Head of the persecuted Church. “I looked, and lo! THE

LAMB!" (so it is in all the ancient MSS., with the definite article),*—"I looked, and lo! *the* Lamb!"—as if that symbol was now to him a well-known and welcome one. He whom he had previously seen, in the opening vision, in the midst of the Throne, adored by the ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, is now beheld "standing on Mount Zion," set as King on His own holy hill. He had with Him, and around Him, an assemblage of an hundred and forty and four thousand ; having (as most versions have it) "*His name*" as well as "*His Father's name* written in their foreheads."† It was expressly asserted in the preceding chapter, as one blasphemous usurpation of the third Beast, or monster from the earth, that "he causeth all, both small and great, both rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand or in their forehead" (xiii. 16). This was Satan, the great counterworker, mimicking and counterfeiting the work of God, as described in the previous sealing-vision, thereby deceiving, if it were possible, the very elect.

John had just seen crouching nations stooping to the usurper, and suffering the degrading mark of vassalage to be put on their foreheads. He looks up to the Church in glory. He sees the redeemed, with the indubitable brand of a diviner vassalage,—bearing in their bodies, (on their foreheads,) "the marks of the Lord Jesus." Then

* See Alford.

† "The LAMB is displayed standing in opposition to the BEAST. The Beast had been seen 'rising from the sea,' the element of tumultuous agitation ; but the LAMB stands upon Mount Zion, 'which shall never be removed.'"—WORDSWORTH's *Notes*.

he listens to a strangely-mingled psalmody, whose combined cadences come floating to his ear, as if it had been one voice from Heaven. It was made up of 'many waters,' 'great thunder,' and 'the voice of harpers harping with their harps.' It was the loudness of the thunder-peal and of the ocean-waves, combined with the dulcet tones of the sweetest musical instrument. The song he heard was "as it were a new song." We are not told in what its newness or novelty consisted, nor what formed the burden of its magnificent melodies; probably it would be an ascription of joyful thanksgiving for their safe deliverance, on the part of those who had now exchanged the pilgrim warfare for the pilgrim rest: those who, with eagle-wings, had once taken themselves to the desert shelter, but who had now soared to the heights of Heaven, and made their perch on the Tree of Life in the midst of the Paradise of God. It may have been a song in which was mingled a celebration of safety and joy, with the rehearsal of former struggles—the trials they had patiently borne, the temptations they had successfully resisted; or it may have been a song of heart-cheer and encouragement directed to the toiling warriors and sufferers below, anticipatory of a like sure triumph if faithful unto death; or it may have been a song only "as it were" new, but which was really the ever old one,—the same which Abel sang at the gates of Eden, and which John had either sung that day on the rocks of Patmos, or subsequently in his home at Ephesus—"Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood!" All the information he gives us regarding the song is, that no man could

learn it but the hundred and forty and four thousand. It could not be understood or sung by the saintliest of human lips, inasmuch as, very possibly, until the spirits of the just are 'made perfect,'—until they are ushered into their state of glorification,—they cannot fully comprehend the language of Heaven; those "unspeakable words which it is not lawful (or possible) for a man to utter." Even this favoured Apostle, in entering the Temple above, would require his lips to be touched with the seraphic live-coal, before they could be attuned to the meaning and melody of its praises.

Such being the scene of worship in Heaven unfolded to the eye of the Apostle, let us proceed to note the delineation here given of its worshippers.

(1.) They are described as *Redeemed* (ver. 3)—“Which were redeemed from the earth.” And, again (ver. 4), “These were redeemed from among men.” Not that modern amplification of Scripture—that travestie of a revealed truth—which would read it, “the redeemed of the earth,” as indicating the universal ransom and restoration of the race. But “the redeemed *from among*” the ransomed elect—those represented in a former vision as specially sealed, or in the preceding chapter as having overcome the red dragon, (yea, all their foes,) by the blood, or “owing to the blood, of the Lamb.” In other words, they are God’s own seven thousand (distinguished from the Baal-throng), once hidden in the wilderness-caves of earth, now for ever in the clefts of the True Rock of Ages—safe from the windy storm and tempest.

This warrant for the possession and tenure of their thrones and their crowns, occupies, as well it may, the forefront and vanguard of their characteristics. It is the repetition, in another form, of the words of a recent figureation we specially considered—"Who have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." As on the earthly mount of Transfiguration, so on this heavenly Zion, the Apostle recognises the theme of ecstatic converse to be, "the decease accomplished at Jerusalem." Their New song is the song of Redeeming love. Redemption has alone earned them a right to the description with which the vision closes, when they are spoken of as being "without fault before the throne of God."

(2.) The worshippers are represented as being *undefiled*. Not only in this world were they justified by the blood, but they were regenerated and sanctified by the Spirit of Christ. Not only had they the righteousness imputed, but the righteousness implanted: and one special element in that subjective righteousness here mentioned, is that of chastity of life—virgin purity.

How searchingly does the language of the vision come home to every heart, with its deep corruptions and impurities of thought and deed,—making inquisition of those fleshly lusts that war against the soul, which blunt and wound and defile the conscience, and all the sensibilities of our higher natures, setting these on fire of hell—the fierce antagonists to that holiness, without which, it is declared, no one can see, and, doubtless, no one can enjoy, God! How it brings down the sentence

of withering condemnation on those, whose unchaste imaginations and unchaste lives have converted their souls (yes, these souls that were designed to be God's temple) into chambers full of all pollution and sensual imagery—a den of foul beasts, a cage of unclean birds;—those whose every look is impurity, and who are as reckless of the virtue and innocence of others as they are of their own! How could any such, wallowing ever deeper in the mire, dream of joining that unspotted band in the Heavenly Zion? How could these polluted lips think of warbling the virgin-song of the undefiled? Those who are thus earthly, selfish, sensual, devilish, would be as incapable of appreciating that bliss, as the uncultured and untutored savage, to whom noise is alone music, and gaudy tinsel is alone beauty, could appreciate the exquisite harmonies of Mozart or Beethoven. Ascend to Heaven! join the faultless choir before the throne! Nay, they are self-conscious that they carry a chronic hell within them. The words which our own great epic poet puts into the lips of Satan, are indorsed by such, as containing a too truthful description and photograph of their own feelings and history:—

“ Each way I fly is hell—myself an hell!”

“ Myself an hell!”—its fires already kindled,—the hell of fiendish, lustful, polluted thoughts, with their corresponding hell of remorse and upbraiding,—the eagles of vengeance already preying on the carcase,—the fabled lash of the Furies already descending,—retribution already begun.

On the other hand, blessed truly are “the *undefiled*, who walk in the law of the Lord;”—who have escaped the corruptions that are in the world through lust; in the volume of whose heart the white leaves have their virgin purity unblotted and unstained. Ye, too, who are mourning the loss of those whose sun has gone down in early morning,—who, full of high promise, have perished “at the threshold-march of life”;—rejoice in the thought that they have “clean escaped”;—that these lambs of the flock have passed into the heavenly fold, with the fleece of early innocence unpolluted. Before impurity stirred the well of pure thought, they have been taken away, it may be, from much evil to come! More blessed and honoured, in one sense, are those—and many such there are—who, by dint of resolute self-discipline and high principle, have bravely fought the long fight, and come out of it unwounded, unscathed; who with unabashed face can make the appeal, to the great Heart-Searcher, of a good conscience and a pure life: but *safer* at least are they, who, away from the sudden gusts and hurricanes of temptation, have soared early upwards, and, with unsoiled plumage—unruffled wings, have sank into the clefts of the Rock for ever. If they had been suffered to remain longer on earth, who can tell but some rude storm might have blighted fair promise and belied fond hopes? But ere summer’s sun could scorch, nay, ere spring’s frost could nip one bud or blast one leaf or blossom, the Great Giver, in mercy, took the flower to His own safer paradise,—gave the summons,

“ Waft her, angels, to the skies,
 Far above yon azure plain ;
 Glorious there like you to rise,
 There like you for ever reign.”

Oh ! what would thousand thousands give, who are now drifting, as miserable, shattered wrecks on life's sea—health, innocence, purity, gone ;—what would such give, to be as *they* are, inheriting in all its grandeur that best beatitude—“ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God ! ”

“ She is not dead, the child of our affection,
 But gone into that school,
 Where she no longer needs our poor protection,
 Where Christ Himself doth rule.”

“ In that great cloister's stillness and seclusion,
 By guardian angels led,
 Safe from temptation, safe from sin's pollution,
 She *lives* whom we call *dead*.”

(3.) They are represented as *following Christ* (ver. 4)—“ These are they which follow ” (or literally ‘*who are following*’) “ the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.” They are seen indeed, in common with their great Lord, “ standing ” on the Mount Zion. But it is standing girt for His service—prepared to embark in ministries of holy love for Him ; and, along with “ the armies which are in Heaven,” spoken of in a subsequent vision, ready to follow Him “ upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean ” (xix. 14). Is this our conception of a future state of bliss ? Not a dreamland of inaction, consisting only of a series of negations, the absence of the sad catalogue of ills which beset us here ; but do we realise it as a sphere of holy, spiritual activity, where we

shall be enlisted in embassies of love and loyalty to the dear Lord who redeemed us? If so, Heaven—the manhood of our spiritual being—should have, at all events, its childhood on earth; what we are to *be*, should have its dim and shadowy reflection in what we now *are*. If we are to follow the Lamb in glory, that path of trustful and loving obedience should have its commencement here. Is it so? Are we thus following Him;—following Him as a flock trustfully follows its shepherd? following Him, not fitfully or capriciously,—not at set times and seasons only, when the summer sky is overhead, and the birds are on the boughs, and the valleys of life are shouting for joy; but willing to follow Him when the sky is lowering,—when the birds have folded their wings, and these valleys of existence are shrouded in mist and darkness;—no patches of verdant grass to be seen, the music of no still waters to be heard, yet ready to say, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him?” Do we follow Him in the sense of seeking to be *like* Him—to have our wills coincident with His?—setting His great Life of purity and obedience and self-sacrifice before us, and desiring that ours be a feeble transcript of its spotless excellencies? Do we follow Him, moreover, with the realising thought before us of a *Living Person*?—not as the votaries of a creed, linked to some dry and formulated dogmas from which the great living ‘life’ has departed;—but following, as these undefiled and faultless on the Mount Zion are represented as doing—following Himself—the Lamb of God;—anticipating the time when “we shall be like Him, for we shall *see Him as He is*,” and when we shall

be able to say, with an emphasis the words of Peter never possessed, "We are eye witnesses of His majesty: we are with *Him* in the Holy Mount!"

(4.) One other characteristic of the hundred and forty and four thousand is here mentioned:—they are *guileless* (ver. 5) "And in their mouth was found no guile." It is the echo in the New, of an Old Testament beatitude, "Blessed is the man . . . in whose spirit there is *no guile*." The great Lord of all, could pronounce no higher encomium on an earnest seeker becoming a beloved follower, than this—"Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is *no guile*." We need not consider strange the special closing reference which is here made to this attribute of heavenly bliss, when we think how much of the reverse is, alas! manifested on earth;—how much duplicity, double-dealing, want of candour, truthlessness, disingenuousness,—how much *finessing* and deceit, counterfeiting the pure and the real with what is base admixture and alloy,—pretentious blossom with an utter failure of fruit; a world of appearances, mocking and deceiving; like the apples of Sodom, beautiful to look upon, but perishable caskets enshrining dust and ashes. They who have grown thus weary with a world's falseness and hollow hypocrisy will cease to wonder how, amid higher elements of bliss, John finishes the record of one of the grandest of his visions with the assertion regarding the redeemed—"And in their mouth was found *no guile*, for they are without fault before the throne of God."

This entire figuration, as we have seen, was primarily

intended as a vision of comfort for the Church in her dark days, when the wilderness was her home and the dragon of persecution was tracking her flight. She is encouraged to look forward to that bridal-hour, when, as the affianced Spouse of the Heavenly Bridegroom, she shall come up from the wilderness leaning on the arm of her Beloved, to sing her nuptial song on the Hill of Zion. But it is a vision of comfort and consolation also, to every individual pilgrim and child of sorrow. It is a glimpse above and beyond the clouds, into that calm world where the voice of wailing is no more heard, "wasting nor destruction within its borders." It tells, that whatever be the needed wilderness-discipline here, the redeemed of the Lord shall at last come to Zion with everlasting songs on their heads. To all of us, it is an answer to the question, 'What are the characteristics, what the qualifications, of that heavenly citizenship?' "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart—who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity nor sworn deceitfully" (Ps. xxiv. 3, 4). "He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart" (Ps. xv. 2). "He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation" (Ps. xxiv. 5).

XVIII.

The Blessedness of the Holy Dead.

“ AND I HEARD A VOICE FROM HEAVEN SAYING UNTO ME, WRITE, BLESSED ARE THE DEAD WHICH DIE IN THE LORD FROM HENCEFORTH : YEA, SAITH THE SPIRIT, THAT THEY MAY REST FROM THEIR LABOURS ; AND THEIR WORKS DO FOLLOW THEM.”—REV. XIV. 13.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE HOLY DEAD.

THE beautiful vision we last considered, was intended, as we found, to be one of comfort and consolation for the Church in a season of environing darkness and trouble. It is followed immediately by a succession of three angel-voices. The first, is that of the bearer of the everlasting Gospel, as he speeds his way in mid-heaven to the nations of the earth, with the wide commission to preach the glad tidings to every nation and kindred and tongue and people. The second, intimates the fall of the mystic Babylon. The third, in tones louder still, issues a proclamation of warning to all abettors of the great anti-christian apostacy, to come out from among them, that they be not partakers of her plagues.

It is at the close of these three, that the words which head this chapter come in, like another of those sweet, solitary strains of heavenly music we have noted more than once in the preceding pages. One gorgeous and awful picture after another had just been passing before the eye of the Apostle ; the scroll had its alternate dark letters, and its illuminated colouring. But there was something now which could not be delineated by symbol. It is a Divine revelation, addressed, not to the eye, but to the ear. Moreover, it was one of such sacred importance as to demand immediate transcription. Other words—

other picturings and figurations—might be safely left to memory ; but this, indited by a heavenly voice on the spot, must on the spot too be committed to writing. The roll of apocalyptic thunders is suddenly hushed, and thus is the silence broken :—“ And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth : Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours ; and their works do follow them.”

It is vain to inquire from whom this voice proceeded. This is left indeterminate. It may possibly have come from one of the four-and-twenty elders of chapter vii. ;—possibly it may have emanated from the Great Covenant Angel Himself—the August Being standing on the sea and the earth, with ‘the little book’ in His hand. More probably it may have been uttered by one specially delegated from the ranks of the ministering spirits, who are sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation ;—some heavenly Barnabas—some “ Son of Consolation ” despatched on an errand of comfort to the lonely isle and its lonely prisoner. Be he, however, who he may, his voice has become loud as the sound of many waters : for the brief utterance, wafted like a chime from the bells of the Upper Sanctuary, has awoke chords of responsive harmony in ten thousand thousand aching and sorrowing hearts in every age of the world. Nor need we pause too curiously to ascertain the precise meaning and import of the term here used, “ from henceforth.” It may simply indicate, that, from the moment of death, when the spirit is emancipated from its earthly fetters, that blessedness

begins ; or, as in the verse immediately preceding, John speaks of "the patience or endurance of the saints" in the midst of their persecutions, it might be designed, in the first instance, as a special word of hope and comfort to those who had the prospect of suffering and martyrdom. But it was by no means restricted to such. It is a message intended and adapted for all time and for all places ;—wherever there are weeping eyes and bleeding hearts ;—wherever there is a Christian's deathbed,—a Christian's funeral,—a Christian's grave.

Let us consider these two points :—

I. The Beatitude—"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." And

II. Its divine ratification—"Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours : and their works do follow them."

I. "*Blessed are the dead.*" Startling words are these, viewed by themselves and apart from the Gospel. "*Blessed are the dead!*" How the death-chamber belies the utterance—refuses to countersign the strange benediction ! Where is the blessedness in the spectacle of that inanimate clay—that mute and voiceless marble—that mouldering and shattered casket from which the glory has departed ? Seems it not a cruel mockery—a parody on the sacred words ? That eye which once beamed affection now rayless ;—that hand which once gave and returned the grasp of tender love, or that smoothed the wrinkles from the brow of care or sorrow, now

powerless ;—that intellect with its varied resources—the memory with its garnered treasures—the heart with its divine sympathies—all now dull, pulseless, unresponsive as the insensate stone ! Call you the flower ‘blessed,’ that yesterday was swinging its tiny censers with their fragrant perfumes, but which to-day, nipped by the frost, or battered by the hail, hangs shrivelled on the branch or has fallen on the ground ? Call you the giant oak, the ancestral monarch of the forest ‘blessed,’ when it lies prone on the sward with upturned roots, wrenched from its old moorings by the sweep of the pitiless tempest ? Call you the sculptor’s breathing marble ‘blessed,’ which had just received the last delicate strokes of his chisel, but which, by untoward accident, strews in a hundred fragments the floor of his studio ? Then, but not till then, can you pronounce ‘blessed’ that apparent destruction of all that is fair and lovely in life,—that cruel severance of dearest ties and fondest associations,—the eclipse and extinction of some orb of love, some familiar star, which has risen and set, gleamed and gladdened in the little firmament of our being ever since memory did its work ! And then follow that procession to the narrow house appointed for all living ;—while the bright jewel is gone, the very casket, broken and mutilated, must be buried out of our sight. Not the altar-fire only is quenched, but the shrine itself must be demolished. The green sod or the silent stone is all that is left to memorialise the ‘loved and lost.’ No, no ! call it not ‘blessed.’ There can be no gladness—no jubilee here. Stop the music of pipe and tabret : call in the

hired minstrels : muffle the drum : put sackcloth on the loins : sit in dust and in ashes : say, ‘ Ah, my brother ! ’ or, ‘ Ah, sister ! ’ Mock not the dead—mock not the living, with the mistimed utterance of ‘ blessed.’ It is not the scene or occasion for beatitude and benediction. Death ! it is a dark, cruel, ruthless, repulsive thing ;—a cold, frigid avalanche coming sweeping down amid the warm heart’s affections—making earth’s smiling valleys scenes of desolation and ruin. It is an anomaly in God’s universe.

“ It is a dread and awful thing to die.”

The ship has sailed to the silent land, we know not whither. No sign, no look of affection can be returned as we wave the tearful adieu. There is no retracing of the voyage ;—no homeward-bound vessel from these distant mysterious shores. We need not hoist the signal ;—love need not light its beacon to greet the lone wanderer. “ Weep sore for him that goeth away : for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.”

Such is nature’s cold philosophy,—nature’s sad soliloquy, uncheered and unillumined by the Gospel. Such, too, is the sad musing of many to whom that Gospel has never come in its quickening and enlightening power,—to whom the present is their “ be all and end all.” It is the Christian alone, who, under the teachings of a diviner philosophy, can utter through tears, as he stands by the grave of those who have fallen asleep in Jesus, “ Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.”

We cannot pause now to investigate the pregnant meaning of that brief description of the Christian cha-

racter here given, “ which die *in the Lord.*” Those who have been privileged to stand by a believer’s death-bed will know what the phrase means better than by words. It implies vital union with Christ; the acceptance of Him as a Saviour, alike from the guilt and the power of sin; and the reality of which union has been evidenced by the testimony of a holy life. It is effected not by the application of the outward baptismal sign; not by sacramental act, or efficacy, or lustration; not by the holding up of the crucifix before the face of the dying, nor muttering prayers and incantations over the bier of the dead: neither does it consist in the badge and shibboleth of any ecclesiastical party, nor in the mere pious utterances of the last hour, to which the whole previous life is in painful contrast. It is not the transient ecstasy of frame and feeling,—not the bidding farewell to the world, and an avowed resignation to leave it when nothing else remains; a willingness to loose the cable when the vessel is already drifting from its anchorage into infinite darkness. Far less is it the sinful, morbid desire—dictated often by wounded pride, or disappointed ambition, or faithless friendship—to be done with the world, and become oblivious to its ingratitude and wrongs,—saying, with the fugitive Prophet of Carmel, “It is enough—take away my life;” or, with the peevish Prophet of Nineveh, “It is better for me to die than to live.” But it is the calm, peaceful resting at the close of all, on the work and merits of a Saviour long found and long precious. It is Paul’s noble and triumphant affirmation, “To die is gain,” grounded on the antecedent testimony, “For me to live

is Christ." The sublime consciousness that he was "in the Lord," gave him a noble indifference alike to living or dying; it made him content either for a while with the distant vision, or to be ushered at once into the full fruition. It mattered not whether Christ were magnified in his body by life or by death. He could say, with heroic calmness and complacency, "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord, or whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's." Oh! to him, and to all such, the last Enemy is robbed of his terrors. What to the sinner is the gloomy portico leading to the grave, is to the Christian the vestibule of Heaven. The life of faith in the Son of God encircles, like a nimbus of glory, his dying head.

Neither is it of any moment where or how that death may be. It may be the long tedious experience of months and years, when pin by pin of the earthly tabernacle is taken down,—the wasting consumption, the gradual decay; or it may be with the speed and suddenness of the lightning-flash. It may be in the stillness and quiet of the home-chamber, surrounded with loving eyes and familiar voices; or it may be in some far-off Patmos isle,—or in the hut of the settler,—or in the cabin on the lone sea,—or in the dungeon's darkness,—or at the martyr's pyre,—or amid the shout and shell of battle. It signifies not: the Gospel *requiem* is the same wherever sounded. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." "*Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.*"

II. But this angel-utterance is ratified by a Divine voice—"Yea, saith the Spirit." The Divine Spirit of God sets His seal to the beatitude; and He assigns a two-fold reason for the blessedness which had just been pronounced on the holy dead.

(1.) "*They rest from their labours.*" Many are the scriptural symbols employed to illustrate the future glory and happiness of Heaven. It is spoken of as a mansion, a city, a kingdom, a temple. But no figure comes home with such power and beauty and appropriateness as that of *rest*. It is the weary husbandman having gathered in his implements, and stored the fruit of his spring and summer toils. It is the weary labourer at the end of life's long week enjoying the calm of the eternal Sabbath. It is the warrior having ungirded his stained and dust-covered armour on the banks of the river of life, and exchanged the weapons of conflict for the festal palm and the victor's crown. It is the weary bird now no longer beating its wings against the bars of its cage, as it caught up the notes trilled in the far country, and warbled its pensive earth-song—"Oh, that I had wings, . . . for then would I flee away and be at *rest!*!" Sin and suffering together have converted this fair earth into a place of wailing and unrest, and made the spirit long for a world where these are felt and feared no more. Not that the Christian desires heaven as a place of exemption from the holy activities of his being. No! if we hear of "the Divine gift of rest," there is "a divine gift of work" too. Work, consecrated work, even on earth is happiness; and the

higher the consecration the higher will be the satisfaction in the unresting occupations of the glorified. The believer longs only for cessation from that which impedes his activities here ; and the absence of which would enable him to continue a rejoicing labourer in that world where the cry is never heard—“ Oh, wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? ” There he will be enabled to serve God without interruption. No baffled labour ; no crushing disappointments ; no wearing anxieties ; no treachery of tried and trusted friends ; no dumb, secret griefs, which, unknown to the world, take from life its sweetest ingredients ; no evil heart of unbelief , no failure of cherished plans and brilliant hopes ; no sickness, laying its paralysing hand on successful toil, and crippling the warrior on the very eve of conquest ; but rather, the bud checked on earth will expand into blossom ; those cutoff in the midst of their days will be permitted to complete the unfinished and unfulfilled purpose, and, unclogged by all material hindrances, to go forth in endless missions and ministries of loving service. It will be “ the rest without a rest ”—the rest from sin, and the rest in God.—“ Blessed ” are such dead ! “ This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing ” (Isa. xxviii. 12).

(2.) A second element in the blessedness of the holy dead here given is, that “ their works do follow them.” “ Not,” says an old divine, “ that their works go *before* them in order to win God’s favour.” But they follow *after* them, alike as the tests and evidences of their vital living union to Christ, and as the grounds on which will be appor-

tioned the nature and degree of their eternal recompense.

For we must never, for the support and vindication of one great Bible declaration, nullify and contradict another. While the title to heaven is altogether apart from ourselves, secured as a free gift of grace in Christ —the purchase of His dying love ; yet every good deed done by His people as the fruit of their faith, will have its corresponding reward. As in the material firmament ‘one star differs from another star in glory,’ so will believers have their different spheres assigned them in the firmament of eternity,—some describing a nearer, some a more distant orbit relative to the great central throne. There will be the inheritor of five and the inheritor of ten cities ; the possessor of the five talents and the possessor of ten ; those who will shine as the brightness of the firmament ; those who will have a coronal of surpassing glory round their brows, even “as the stars for ever and ever.” It is not, however, the doer of great works and gigantic or brilliant deeds who alone is to have this glorious recompense,—he who out of his abundance can give the golden tribute to the cause of Christ, or bear in a jewelled cup the offering of love to His people ; but the poor, the humble, the lonely, the bedridden, who have glorified their Saviour by meek submission and patient bearing of the cross ; who had nothing to give but the two mites, or the cup of cold water, and that, too, from an earthen pitcher ; yet valued and recompensed by Him who accepteth according to what a man hath, not according to what he hath not.

Nor must we exclude from the words their significant meaning with reference to this world, as well as to the next. For even here the works of the holy dead do follow them. When a Christian dies,—when the lips are closed and the voice silent, and the sods of the churchyard cover him—that is not the last of the man in the living sphere of living being, which in one sense he has left. *He lives on!* There is a presence and influence more real, more deathless, than the mere bodily frame. Like the glow of the descending sun lighting up the Alpine peaks long after the orb itself has sunk behind the visible horizon, so the works of the holy and the good linger behind them. They have an earthly as well as a heavenly immortality. The friend you loved is sleeping the long sleep where “the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest.” Men say of him, as they miss him on the street, or in the busy mart, or in the house of God, “He is gone!” Nay, not so. Call not the sacred spot where his ashes lie—call it not regarding *him*, “the land of forgetfulness.” His words and works are still amongst us. There is a speech of the dead, the language of undying memories. The outward features have perished, but the spirit is indestructible. Mind cannot die. Holy deeds know no death-bed, no grave, no corruption. “The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance.”

How many there are whose only “blessed life” is the life of sense—the life of selfish and sensuous pleasure—the life of glitter and display and superficial gaiety! In such, there is nothing glorious to “follow;” and

even those things which are objects of honourable aspiration—lands, houses, riches, titles, diadems—the accidents of existence, not its realities—cannot be ferried across the dark river. Then it will be said to every votary of the present and the perishable, who has no reversion in aught that is higher and better, “ Thy gold perish with thee ;” “ Remove the diadem, take off the crown ;” “ The fashion of this world passeth away.”

Let us ask, What anticipations have we regarding our own departure ? Can we contemplate that hour with calm emotion ? Can we echo and anticipate regarding it and ourselves the words before us ? or are we content to leave it an unsolved problem till the unwelcome hour arrives ? Certain on everything else, are we all uncertainty on this ?—heedless, it may be, whether the works following will be the trail of light or the shadows of darkness, and the legacy we bequeath that of blessings or of curses. There is nothing, surely, more calculated to rouse from the perilous dream of indifference to the hopes and hazards of eternity, than to bear about with us the realising sense of this aspect of a limitless future—as the perpetuation and expansion of present character, the prolongation of present tastes and habits. The works of earth, “ following ” like the wake of a vessel, will have their completion in the world beyond. Earth is the germ, the seed-plot of immortality ; the child of time is the father of the full-grown manhood of eternity. Every passing hour of the present is grouping and shaping that endless futurity ; these transient moments we now value so little, are moulding everlasting destinies ; the words we utter to-day will go

echoing on for ever ; the deeds done to-day will be the architects of our bliss or woe, and will outlast millenniums.

And if such be the case, then it is plain that character is not a thing that can be formed and extemporised on a death-bed. Character is the epitome of the life—the steady glow of its morning, noon, and evening hours ; not the mere watery gleam and burst of sunshine at the close. We dare not, indeed, limit the grace of God ; we dare not close the doors against the peradventure of a death-bed repentance ; and yet we never can sufficiently lift up the voice of warning against the awful deception of which thousands are guilty, who flatter themselves that a few hours of penitence, just when the sand-glass is at its final grain, will reverse a guilty past—that a few tears then, will wipe out what has been graven on the life as with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever. Oh, “live in the Lord” if you would “die in the Lord!”

And if these words we have been pondering have to any a more sacred meaning,—if they sound fresh in your memories, as you may have lately stood by the solemn death-bed or solemn grave, the lines chiselled with tears on your heart of hearts,—take them from the unknown heavenly Voice of the Vision as a special parable of consolation. I repeat, it is beautiful to find in the very midst of a Book of strange and portentous figurations—amid its voices of thunder, and flashes of fire, and smoke of darkness—this gleam of heavenly sunshine,—an olive branch of comfort, borne to the lonely exile and lonely heart in the midst of the storm.

What can more touchingly evidence God's tender interest, alike in His dying people and in those who are mourning their departure, than when He thus hushes the tempest's breath, that this balm-word may fall first on the ears of the Island Prisoner, and through him on the ears of a whole weeping world? Yes, believer! "Blessed are your dead." "They have entered into peace; they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness." Kindle around their bier lamps of fire; not the lamps which superstition places around the shrines of the departed, but the holy lights which they themselves kindled,—the lights of faith, and love, and patience, and submission, and meek bearing of injuries, and close walk with God. They have joined the ranks on the distant shore, and beckon you to follow. Be not disobedient to the Heavenly Vision. Grasp up these torches as sacred legacies they have left you, to bear you on in your darkened way. And if their bright example has taught you how to live, let it tune your lips also to the prayer, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like His!"

XIX.

The Song of the Harpers by the
Glassy Sea.

“AND I SAW AS IT WERE A SEA OF GLASS MINGLED WITH FIRE : AND THEM THAT HAD GOTTEN THE VICTORY OVER THE BEAST, AND OVER HIS IMAGE, AND OVER HIS MARK, AND OVER THE NUMBER OF HIS NAME, STAND ON THE SEA OF GLASS, HAVING THE HARPS OF GOD. AND THEY SING THE SONG OF MOSES THE SERVANT OF GOD, AND THE SONG OF THE LAMB, SAYING, GREAT AND MARVELLOUS ARE THY WORKS, LORD GOD ALMIGHTY ; JUST AND TRUE ARE THY WAYS, THOU KING OF SAINTS. WHO SHALL NOT FEAR THEE, O LORD, AND GLORIFY THY NAME ? FOR THOU ONLY ART HOLY. . . . AND THE SEVEN ANGELS CAME OUT OF THE TEMPLE, HAVING THE SEVEN PLAGUES, CLOTHED IN PURE AND WHITE LINEN, AND HAVING THEIR BREASTS GIRDLED WITH GOLDEN GIRDLES. . . . AND I HEARD A GREAT VOICE OUT OF THE TEMPLE SAYING TO THE SEVEN ANGELS, GO YOUR WAYS, AND POUR OUT THE VIALS OF THE WRATH OF GOD UPON THE EARTH.”—REV. XV. 2-4, 6 ; XVI. 1.

THE SONG OF THE HARPERS BY THE GLASSY SEA.

WE have, in previous chapters, taken a rapid glance at two out of the three great parallel or co-ordinate series of visions in the Book of Revelation—those of the Seals and those of the Trumpets. One other group of figurations, that of the Vials, still remains, previous to the grand final disclosures regarding the Celestial City and the Church of the glorified.

We found the two former were preceded by magnificent introductory visions,—the adoration of the slain Lamb, and the Angel with the golden censer standing by the golden altar. So also is it in the case of the Vials, in which there was to be a new symbolic outpouring of divine judgment on one especially of the portentous monsters delineated in chapter xiii.—“the Beast and his image.” The true Church being, moreover, basely counterfeited in this hybrid foe, which conjoined the horns of the Lamb with the mouth of the dragon, could not fail to tremble for her own safety, and to stand in need of a special upholding word of comfort in the prospect of retribution. That preparatory vision of consolation is vouchsafed in the words we are now to consider. Before the seven golden-girded angels come forth from the opened temple, bearing in their hands the cups or bowls of wrath to be

poured on an apostate church and an apostate world, John has his attention directed to another "sign in heaven." It is a sea, calm as glass, mingled with fire. A crowd of victors are seen on its shores, uniting with harp and voice in a song of lofty adoration. There would seem to be little doubt as to the real allusion in the suggestive imagery. Standing, indeed, now (as the spectator himself describes in chapter xiv.), "on the sands of the sea," looking across the *Æ*gean—its calm waters transmuted into molten gold—the island-home of the Apostle-prisoner and its surroundings may have possibly added power and reality to the figuration. But who can question that it had its grand original in the memories of another sea-shore—other minglings of fire—and other harps of triumph? Who can fail, in this new apocalyptic representation, to call to remembrance that ever-illustrious scene in early Jewish story—the proudest in all the old Hebrew annals—when the Israelites, ranged on the sands of Asia with the Red Sea between them and their old house of bondage, sang their song of victory;—Miriam and her sisters answering with timbrels, as they made the shores ring with the refrain—"Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea"? Nor is it the name given—"The Song of Moses"—which alone is suggestive of the allusion. The glassy sea was "mingled with fire." Have we not here, also, the counterpart in that opening drama of the Exodus—the pillar of fire giving its glorious light to Israel, but flashing vengeance on their Egyptian pursuers? You may remember the exceptional appoint-

ment on that night of miracle, with reference to this fiery column : it “ removed and went behind the Hebrews.” At other times their pioneer and precursor, it now remained in their rear ; so that as the Israelites, rank by rank, reached the opposite shore, they saw its lurid light reflected in the waters. The opposite side of the same pillar formed a murky cloud and darkness to the Egyptians ; or, if it emitted light, it was only the fitful gleams and coruscations of the forked lightning—the arrows of God—to dazzle and perplex and terrify. As we read in the magnificent description of a later age, borrowed from the scene—“ The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave His voice ; hailstones and coals of fire. Yea, He sent out His arrows, and scattered them ; and He shot out lightnings, and discomfited them. Then the channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered at Thy rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of Thy nostrils ” (Ps. xviii. 13-15).

Or we may be warranted to take an alternative reference, borrowed from another phase or memory of the same transaction. We may change that scene of the Red Sea from night to early morn, when the triumphant march through the dried-up channel had been completed, —“ not a hoof left behind ;”—and the six hundred thousand emancipated slaves stood safe on the shore. The waves, so late “ roaring and troubled,” had rocked themselves to rest—a still winding-sheet over the submerged chivalry of Egypt. The morning sun, just rising over the eastern desert, had tinged the opposite sand-red hills of

the Ras-Attâka with ruby splendour,—this, again, was reflected as in a mirror of molten fire in the intervening phosphorescent waters.* It matters not which of these two significant references we take. We have in one or both combined, the magnificent original, which is here transferred to the vision of the Exile of Patmos,—“the sea of glass mingled with fire,”—and the harpers singing “the Song of Moses, the servant of God.” After the world’s long night of peril, the symbolic Church of ‘the just made perfect’—God’s glorified Israel—having left for ever behind them the land of their oppressors, stand safe on the heavenly shore. Every billow of tribulation is hushed;—all is changed into a calm, reflecting the glory of the Everlasting Hills, and of the Sun of Righteousness. How vivid the contrast between that glassy, waveless sea—without a disturbing element—and the apostate Church on earth spoken of in chapter xvii. as “seated on many waters;”—fretted with tempest, tossed on a troubled ocean-sea which cannot rest! Blessed and glorious emblem of everlasting tranquillity;—these

* Mr Elliot, whose expository remarks on this passage, in his “*Horæ Apoc.*” are full and satisfactory, gives the following remarkable quotation from a Greek writer in the age of the Ptolemies:—“It is asserted by some, that the mountains west of the Arabian Gulph, as the fierce and fiery ray of the sun strikes upon them, exhibit the glowing appearance of *glowing coal, red with fire*; and that the splendour reflected on the sea dyes its waters with a colour similar.” The same expositor adds, “That an appearance of this nature might be produced by the fierce solar rays striking or reflected on water, is illustrated by a well-known incident in the history of Jehosophat—‘And they rose up early in the morning, and the sun shone upon the water, and the Moabites saw the water on the other side as red as blood’ (2 Kings iii. 22). (See Mr Elliot’s entire observations, vol. iii., pp. 417-21.)

celestial harpers celebrating the downfall of all evil, and recognising, in the survey of the past, the love, wisdom, and faithfulness of God's every dealing: this their joyful testimony and experience on these blissful shores,—“We went through fire and through water, but Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.”

We may add, in a word, yet one other feature of resemblance. It is the place which the vision occupies in the Apocalypse, in connection with the pouring out of the vials;—recalling vividly, also, the vial-plagues of Egypt, the pouring forth of which preceded Israel's emancipation. For although we have spoken of these beautiful words as a prologue or introduction to the seven plagues which follow, perhaps from the literal rendering of one of the phrases* we may also assign to them this additional significance, that they are not only pre-cursive and anticipatory, but are rather sung all through the course of the vial-outpouring. The girded angels pause, so to speak, to listen in silence to their commencement; but after the former have issued from the temple, the song continues. It is not a brief introductory solo merely,—a solitary pæan before the conflict; but rather like martial music mingling in the roll of battle, or like words of heart-cheer and sympathy borne ever and anon, amid the surging of the tempest, to the ears of the perishing crew. If so, the song has this additional interesting characteristic, that it is being sung now;—that as the judgment-angels are abroad on their mission, the ear of faith can catch up its strains. The song of the

* *τόνος νικῶντας*, “those conquering,” not “those who had conquered.”

Church perfected we shall come to hereafter; the present is that of the partially completed and completing ranks of the glorified. It is the song sung on the Heavenly Mount while the battle is still raging in the plain beneath. Let us then, for a little, ungird the wilderness-armour and hearken to the music of the harps of God. On His own Sabbath, it may be, the day and hour of solemn truce, with the arms of conflict piled on the silent sands, let us forget the Egypt plagues behind, and the perils of the desert before, and listen with rapt reverence to "the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb."

There are various interesting views we may take of this blended song.

First, we may regard it as *the Song of the two Dispensations*—that of the Old and the New;—the mighty multitude of redeemed gathered in under both, meeting under their great representative heads—a united Church. The glorious company of apostles, the goodly fellowship of prophets, and the noble army of martyrs, are assembled on the celestial shores to sing the song of their common deliverance,—to mingle their combined yet diverse experiences, and proclaim these for the encouragement of the drooping and faint-hearted, who are still struggling in the conflict, or buffeting the billows.

How vast and varied are these experiences! Each harper has his own tale to utter and his own song to sing. There are the patriarchal harps swept by the hand of Abel and Noah, Abraham and Joseph; telling of pur-

poses of covenant love proclaimed amid the withered bowers of Eden, or written in the bow of heaven that spanned the receding waters of the flood, or recalling mercies that were showered around the tent of the Pilgrim of Canaan and the Captive in the Egyptian dungeon. There are the prophetic harps, from Moses to Malachi, rehearsing those glowing utterances which evoked of old their tuneful melodies. There is Isaiah, resuming the very strain of his undying parable of consolation, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people;"—Hezekiah with his balm-words for the troubled and terror-stricken, "God is our refuge and strength, a present help in trouble;"—David and Daniel, with their older memories of heroic faith and calm reliance, which led to ultimate deliverance and victory. There is the harp of the Simeons and Annas, who, in their day and generation, stood on the threshold of a new era of time, celebrating still the praises of the great "Consolation of Israel," for whom they had long waited, and waited not in vain. There is the Baptist, in the presence of the "True Light," uttering louder than ever his old proclamation—"He must increase, but I must decrease." One after another of the apostolic band has his own hallowed story to relate—reminiscences of touching tenderness, and motives and encouragements to brave and stern endurance. John has more glorious visions of endearing fellowship with his great Lord than all the sublime picturings of Patmos. Paul has to tell how the things that happened unto him "have fallen out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel." Peter, in

loud accents which know no faltering, can now exclaim, “Lord, Thou knowest all things ; Thou knowest that I love Thee.” We can listen to the holy women of Judea and Galilee who tracked on earth the footsteps of Incarnate Mercy, joining with the Miriams and the Deborahs of the olden dispensation in abundantly uttering the memory of His great goodness, and talking of His righteousness. There are the Marys and the Elizabeths, rejoicing in God their Saviour. There is the weeping penitent of Gennesaret with nothing now but the tear of love in her eyes, sweeping her harp with bolder hand because she had been forgiven much. There is the woman of Sychar and Mary of Magdala, and the sisters of Bethany, and the other holy watchers by the tomb of buried love, now echoing and prolonging the song through everlasting ages which they were the first to raise, “The Lord is risen indeed.” There are the martyred multitudes under Rome Pagan, and the faithful and heroic confessors under Rome Papal, who are described, in this vision of the crowned harpers, as having “gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over the number of his name.” But we are lost in the attempt to catch up or follow these lofty harmonies. It is the blending, in one magnificent cadence, of all the voices of the fast-gathering Church triumphant ;—from Adam, retuning the broken harp of Paradise lost, to those who are at this very hour entering the spirit-land ; all of every rank and of every age ;—from the true Israelite wearing the monarch’s crown, to the true Israelite whose earthly birthright was rags and penury ;—from the aged Mel-

chizedecs and Methuselahs and Elis, to the little children who sang their hosannahs in the temple—the representatives of ten thousand thousand whose infant tongues, stilled on earth, have been early tuned to the immortal song. Oh! whatever be the jarring notes of conflicting ages and conflicting sects here, all is harmony yonder. “They that are delivered from the noise of archers,” now, in the fellowship of unmarred and unbroken communion, rehearse to one another, harp answering to harp, and soul to soul, “the righteous acts of the Lord.” It is the realisation of the longed-for unity of God’s people;—the interchange of the patriarchal and the apostolic—the Jewish and the Christian;—the Song of Moses blending in sweet accord with the Song of the Lamb; and the words of sublime liturgy, so often belied on earth, become the noble and truthful liturgy of Heaven, “The Church throughout all the world doth acknowledge Thee!”

II. Another view we may take of this blended ascription is, that which is most obvious,—to regard it as the song of *Providence* and the song of *Grace*.

“The Song of Moses,”—the song of Providence.

“The Song of the Lamb,”—the song of Grace, or Redemption.

The anthem itself is an antiphonal strain, sung in alternate parts; and its subject-matter, as given in verses 3, 4, would seem to justify the twofold division. It was God’s wondrous providential “*works*,” in the miraculous plagues of Egypt and the passage of the Red Sea, which formed

the special theme of the olden Song of Moses. The Song of the Lamb, again,—that of the New Testament Church—celebrated rather the wondrous “*ways*” of God,—His justice, His truth, His awful holiness, as manifested in the plan of redemption. And, therefore, if the strains of the former befittingly be this—“Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty,” no less appropriate and beautiful are those of the latter—“Just and true are all Thy ways, Thou King of Saints; who shall not fear Thee, and glorify Thy name? for Thou only art holy.”

First, then, let us hear these harpers sing *the Song of PROVIDENCE*,—“the Song of Moses, the servant of God.” They delight, in other words, to sing a song similar to that which Moses sang on the shores of the Red Sea,—the leading characteristic of which is the recognition and adoration of God’s sovereignty. It is worthy of special note, how strikingly, in all their references to the exodus, the Hebrew psalmists and prophets love to bring into bold prominence this grand feature of the *personal* agency, prescience, and power of Jehovah. “They went through the flood on foot; then did we rejoice in *Him*.” “*He* divided the sea, and caused them to pass through, and *He* made the waters to stand as an heap. In the daytime, also, *He* led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire.” “*Thou* didst ride upon Thine horses and Thy chariots of salvation. *Thou* didst walk through the sea with Thine horses,—through the heap of great waters.” And these are but the echoes of the original song itself. “*Thy* right hand, O God, has become

glorious in power. *Thy* right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. With the blast of *Thy* nostrils the waters were gathered together ; the floods stood upright as an heap. The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil. THOU didst blow with Thy wind ; the sea covered them, they sank as lead in the mighty waters. . . . The LORD shall reign for ever and ever!" Oh! blessed assurance for the Church of God in the midst of all tribulations, and one we have found so often repeated in this closing Book of the sacred Canon, that there is a personal will and a personal God enthroned behind and above these apparently conflicting elements ! The God of the olden pillar-cloud is in the pillar-cloud still. Man proposeth, but He disposeth. It is for us, meanwhile, patiently to wait the development of His plans ; to take on trust these strains from the harpers which we cannot understand till we ourselves join their ranks. Every evolution in the great *programme* is His, who presides alike over the counsels of His Church and the destinies of the nations. It is He who now girds and accoutres the angels of judgment. It is His own mighty voice which gives the commission, "Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth." When that judicial errand was being accomplished, the subsequent confession of one of these ministers of vengeance would doubtless be that of all— "And I heard the angel of the waters say, 'Thou arighteous, O Lord, which art and wast and shalt be, because Thou hast judged thus !'" These glorious Beings, in the execution of their ministry, ask no questions. It is JE-

HOVAH OF HOSTS,—the Lord God Almighty,—the Just, and the True, and the Holy,—who has given them their mandates. With unswerving loyalty, forth they go, panoplied in “pure and white linen, having their breasts girded with golden girdles.” And when their task is done,—when the last vial has been outpoured, and the Great Voice again comes out of the Temple of Heaven, saying, “It is done,”—when they return to their thrones to surrender their trust, and lay the emptied vials at the feet of their great Lord,—what is the next entry of the recording spectator? “After these things I heard a voice of much people in Heaven, saying, Alleluia! Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are His judgments. . . . And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth.”

Let *us* catch up the lofty echo of this Song of Moses,—the Song of Providence; the song sung—ay, and now being sung, on the shores of glory. The Providence which sits enthroned over the Church and the world presides over our individual destinies. Often there may be profound mysteries in the Divine dealings,—“deep may call to deep.” We may at times lose the footsteps of a God of love, and be led in our bewilderment to exclaim, “Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the deep waters, and Thy judgments are not known.” But there is a day coming when the rectitude of His dispensations will be vindicated.—when the floods which

now lift up their waves and make a mighty noise shall be stilled into a glassy calm, mirroring nothing but the red, fire-like glory of Justice, and Mercy, and Love ; and when, not with the blare of the trumpets of earthly warfare, but on the tuneful chords of Heaven's own sweetest instrument, we shall sing with the harpers on the glassy sea "THE SONG OF MOSES, THE SERVANT OF GOD."

The Second theme of the twofold song is "*The Song of the Lamb*,"—the Song of Grace and of Redemption.

This is a louder, loftier, sublimer strain. We have met it before, more than once, in the previous figurations, so that we have the less need to dwell on it here. In the connection in which it stands in the present passage, we are forcibly reminded of one of the most impressive incidents in the life of our Incarnate Redeemer. Moses, the author of the Song of Providence, in company with another illustrious fellow-harper from the glassy sea, came down to an earthly mount to witness the Transfiguration of Him whose day they had both seen afar off, and were glad. It was not, however, the theme of Providence which then engrossed their thoughts, nor the Song of Providence which thrilled on their lips. "They appeared in glory, and *spake of His decease, which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.*" As if they would thereby proclaim, that the theme of Redemption, the Song of the Lamb, is the sublime topic which fixes the contemplation—tasks the immortal energies of the redeemed above ;—the blessed bond of union linking together the varying dispensations,—the legal, the pro-

phetical, the Gospel,—the Church on earth and the Church in Heaven. All other themes pale before it. All other works and designs of Providence constellate around the Cross of Calvary, as the planets around a central sun. No other theme, no other song, has any glory, by reason of this glory which excelleth:—Christ is all and in all. Not only of Him and through Him, but “*to Him are all things.*” Glorious indeed is the Song of Creation,—the song which the psalmist puts into the lips of the starry heavens, as these spangled, glittering minstrels of the firmament declare the glory of God and show forth His handiwork;—day unto day uttering speech, and night unto night showing knowledge. Glorious, too, was that Song of Moses on the Red Sea shores. No greater or more signal earthly deliverance was ever celebrated in poetry or music. It stands out by itself with peerless grandeur, in annals sacred and profane. But, after all, what a feeble type of that deliverance which is being now sung and celebrated by the heavenly harpers!—a deliverance from the bondage of condemnation and death,—as we look across the sea of Divine wrath, and behold our sins, like the hosts of Pharaoh, sunk into its depths. Oh! sing unto the Lord a *new* song, for He hath done marvellous things: His right hand and His holy arm have gotten Him the victory. Thanks, eternal thanks, be unto God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! If the befitting utterance of Creation and Providence be, “Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty,” Redemption, as it takes its stand by the Cross, and beholds the meeting in blissful har-

mony of all the attributes of Jehovah—Truth with Mercy, and Righteousness with Peace—has this song, too, peculiarly its own—“ Just and true are all Thy ways, Thou King of Saints : who shall not fear Thee, and glorify Thy name ? for Thou only art holy.”

Let us sing that twofold blended song now, that we may sing it for ever. It is continually waxing louder. Well-known voices missed on earth, add to the sublime harpings and melodies of the skies. The host passing through the Red Sea of earthly trial is, age by age, year by year, week by week, diminishing ; the shores of glory are crowding with ever-augmented numbers. Meanwhile, let the girded angels of judgment go forth on their mission ;—and whether it be to pour the contents of their incense-bowls on a desolated world,—on rivers, and fountains, and sea, and lights of heaven,—amid predicted voices and thunderings, lightnings and earthquake,—the crash of falling cities and the wild paroxysms of affrighted nature (Rev. xvi. 1-19) ; or whether it be to carry these vials to individual homes and hearths ;—we shall listen to the voice of Him who hath given the mandate, “ Go your ways ; ” we shall hearken to the calm lullaby stealing down from the harpers on the sea of glass, as they proclaim, amid all convulsions and all changes, the sway alike of a God of Providence and Grace, and exhort us to sing with them, even now, what will form the theme and anthem of eternity—“ *The Song of Moses, the servant of God, and THE SONG OF THE LAMB !* ”

XX.

The Coming One; and the Blessed
Watcher.

"BEHOLD, I COME AS A THIEF. BLESSED IS HE THAT WATCHETH, AND
KEEPETH HIS GARMENTS, LEST HE WALK NAKED."—REV. XVI. 15.

THE COMING ONE ; AND THE BLESSED WATCHER.

IN the previous context, we found the girded angels issuing forth from the Temple with their vessels or vials full of the wrath of God. They are completing their mission of vengeance. The great Day of Judgment—the time of the end—the consummation of all things—is gradually drawing nigh. In the immediately preceding verse there is described a mustering of the forces of evil at the instigation of three unclean spirits. These, in language of strong metaphor, are represented as “going forth unto the kings of the earth, and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.” At this announcement of Satan’s final gigantic effort for mastery—the last conflict of great principles—when a bold and defiant scepticism is rampant, and ungodliness is abounding—the faith of the Church may be ready to fail, and her courage to falter. But a Divine voice, alike of comfort and of warning, breaks in parenthetically. John, up to this point, has been the faithful recorder of the visions which were passing before him. Once more it is THE COMING ONE whose utterances are interjected in the midst of the dreadful and dreaded figurations. It is the old key-note of the Book—the leading “Memory of Patmos,” which is again

sounded. We had almost forgotten it amid the rapid rush and succession of apocalyptic symbols—amid the thunderings, and lightnings, and tempest. But the trumpet-tones once more rise clear and distinct above the clang of battle. He of whom in the first chapter it was announced, “Behold, HE COMETH with clouds”—He who, in the closing chapter of all, announces Himself, “Surely I COME QUICKLY”—makes the intermediate proclamation, “Behold, I COME AS A THIEF: Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments.”

We have in these words a *Monition* and a *Benediction*. Let us briefly ponder them in their order.

I. The MONITION—“Behold, I come as a thief.” The second coming of Christ is to be sudden and unlooked-for. It was not so with His first coming. Independent altogether of Hebrew prophecy, that advent had its dim and shadowy premonitions in the Gentile world. It was amid the hush of general expectation—when “all men were musing”—when, in the words of the great poet,

“Birds of calm sat brooding on the charmed wave”—

when the sword was sheathed, the temple of Janus was shut, and palm branches of peace strewed the pathway of the expected King—that the Child of Bethlehem was born.

“No war or battle’s sound,
Was heard the world around;
The idle spear and shield were high up hung;
The hooked chariot stood
Unstained with hostile blood;
The trumpet spake not to the armed throng;

And kings sat still, with awful eye,
As if they surely knew their Sov'ran Lord was by."*

So also is it with the spiritual Advent of the Redeemer to the souls of His people. That, too, unless in rare and exceptional cases, is a gradual 'coming.' "His going forth is *prepared* as the morning." His approach is not like the abrupt and sweeping waterflood, but rather like the silent dew as it distils imperceptibly on blade and flower. Different will it be, however, at His second Advent. With the speed of the lightning flash—with the suddenness of the entrapping snare, or the assault and surprise of the midnight robber; when men are asleep,—when every bolt and fastening seem proof against the prowling invader,—then the cry shall be heard, "Behold, the Judge standeth before the door!" Our Lord Himself, in His own memorable discourse, gives a vivid picture of the state of the world at His final appearing. It shall be "as in the days of Noah." The antediluvians were pursuing their guilty revelries—listening with mocking incredulity to the strange parable of predicted wrath—seeing in the clear sky overhead no symptoms of coming disaster—when "the flood came and destroyed them all." Or it shall be "as in the days of Lot." The same tale of terror seemed contradicted by the smiling plains beneath and the bright firmament above; for "the sun," we read, "had risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar." In other words, when he reached his shelter, and the hour of doom had arrived, there was nothing seen but the play of sunbeams, "sowing the

* Milton's Hymn on the Nativity.

earth with orient pearl." No portent was visible ; the dwellers in Sodom awoke up, heedless of fears, to a new day of godless riot ; when suddenly the windows of heaven were opened, and bolts of living fire descended on the doomed capitals. So shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. "Behold, I come as a thief." The world will have rocked itself asleep on the subject of its Lord's appearing. That appearing will be among the obsolete dogmas of its creed ; denounced and discarded as the currency of prating fanatics and enthusiasts. It is so in large measure already. Outer nature, in its unvarying and apparently stereotyped laws, gives no indication of any such arrest on its appointed sequences ; day follows night ; summer treads on the heels of winter ; autumn repays with usury the sower's vernal toil. There is no wrinkle on earth's brow—no symptom of decrepitude. It may be rather augured from the progress of science—the gigantic strides of discovery—that she is, like the eagle, moulting her feathers for a renewal of her youth. Nothing is there in the canopy above, nor in the garnered treasures hidden beneath her surface, to countersign and ratify the incredible warning of this Seer of Patmos. The lovers of pleasure—those who desire to have no higher portion than this life—are only too ready to accept these dicta of a godless and sceptic philosophy—to pursue with undisturbed avidity the paths of sin and the race for riches. Secure against invasion, avarice heaps up its treasure, and shouts its defiant boast, "To-morrow shall be as to-day, and much more abundant."

"Nay," says Christ, as He awakes the dormant peal of

the Advent-bell, “credit not the world’s lie; for it is just when that lie has won for itself a fatal acceptance—when mankind have sunk into this state of guilty, bold, defiant indifference—that My footfall shall be heard—‘Behold, I come *as a thief.*’” Just when the scoffer is uttering his presumptuous challenge, “Where is the promise of His coming?”—when all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of the creation;—when the husbandman is pursuing his peaceful labours—when the groves are vocal with song, or the valleys shouting with summer joy;—when the marts of commerce are crowded, and the wheels of industry are revolving,—when the ring of hammers is heard in arsenal and workshop,—when white-winged commerce is tracking as aforetime the highway of the nations,—when the student is poring over his books, or the astronomer is registering the period of the next eclipse, or the politician is casting up the contingencies of peace and war,—when the oblivious world, little dreaming of change, is immersed in her own gigantic selfishness and ambition;—then, yes *then*, “Behold, I come *as a thief.*” The figure here used by the Lord, and spoken by Him from a state of glory, is the very same He employed in His magnificent prophetic utterance on the Mount of Olives in the days of His humiliation. “Watch, therefore,” was the solemn peroration, “for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the *thief* would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.” St Paul uses the same significant

simile—"Yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a *thief* in the night; for when they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh." And to the same effect, Peter remembers the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, "But the day of the Lord will come as a *thief* in the night" (2 Pet. iii. 10). It is at night—midnight—the robber's hour—when darkness has drawn its sable curtains around a silent world—that the cry shall be heard, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh! Go ye out to meet Him."

II. We have spoken of the *Monition*: let us now glance at the appended BENEDICTION—"Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked." The reference here may be the simple and ordinary one, of a man, heedless of all danger, lying down to sleep with his garments cast carelessly aside;—the thief suddenly enters his chamber, takes forcible possession of his clothing, and leaves him naked and defenceless. Or more probably, according to the great commentator Lightfoot,* the allusion may be to a Jewish custom in the service of the Temple of Jerusalem. Twenty-four wards or companies were appointed night by night to guard the various entrances to the sacred courts. One individual was appointed as captain or marshal over the others, called the "Man of the Mountain of the House of God." His duty was to go round the various gates during the night to see that his subordinates were faithful at their posts. Preceded himself

* Vol. i, p. 919.

by men bearing torches, it was expected that each wakeful sentinel should hail his appearance with the password, "Thou man of the mountain of the house, peace be unto thee!" If, through unwatchfulness and slumber, this were neglected, the offender was beaten with the staff of office—his garments were burnt—he was branded with shame for failure of duty, by being left in a state of nakedness. It was in contrast with these slumbering Levites, that Jesus may be supposed to pronounce a blessing on His true people, who watch and keep their garments, and are saved from the reproach of spiritual nakedness. Their attitude is that of wakeful sentinels, who, anticipating their Lord's coming, are ever standing on their watchtower, pacing their rounds, having on the whole armour of God—"the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left;" so that, "being clothed, they may not be found naked." And yet, be it ever remembered, that, knowing the possibility even of His own faithful disciples being involved in this state of drowsy unwatchfulness, it is to them He addresses, as the great Captain and Overseer of His spiritual Temple, the solemn words, "Watch ye, therefore; for ye know not when the Master of the house cometh. At even, or at midnight, or at cock-crowing, or in the morning, lest, coming suddenly, He find you sleeping" (Mark xiii. 35).

Are we in the expectant attitude of those who are described as they that "love His appearing?"—who are waiting for "the promise of His coming?"—who are "looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of

God?" That second coming of Christ *ought* with all of us to be regarded by its apostolic name as "The Blessed Hope"—the polar star in the sky of the future. It is true, indeed, that in one sense, to the believer, death is equivalent to the coming of his Lord, as being the hour which will usher him into His immediate presence. But death is never spoken of in Scripture as a blessed hope. Even the Christian holds his breath as the King of Terrors passes by. He may be ready to slip the cable whenever his Lord gives the word,—he may be ready to enter the dark valley, and, under the guidance and grace of the Shepherd-Leader, he may fear no evil ;—but it is a dark valley notwithstanding: the tear, and the cypress, and the sable mourning, have ever formed the associations and accompaniments of the final hour and scene. Not so is it, however, with Christ's Advent. It is a jubilant anticipation. The believer can long for it—can pray for it—"Even so, COME Lord Jesus ;" "Make no tarrying, O my God ;" "Make haste, my Beloved: be Thou like to a roe or to a young hart on the mountains of spices." Old Francis Quarles, three centuries ago, thus loved to sing in quaint but tuneful melody:—

"Will't ne'er be morning? will that promised light
Ne'er break, and clear those clouds of night?
Sweet Phosphor, bring the day
Whose conquering ray
May chase these fogs: sweet Phosphor, bring the day!
Let those whose eyes, like owls, abhor the light;
Let those have night that love the night:
Sweet Phosphor, bring the day!
How sad delay
Afflicts dull hopes! sweet Phosphor, bring the day!

Here's all the suns that glister in the sphere
 Of earth : Ah me ! what comfort's here ?
 Sweet Phosphor, bring the day !
 Haste, haste away,
 Heaven's loitering lamp ! sweet Phosphor, bring the day."

Or how often does Samuel Rutherford break forth into some such impassioned words as these :—" All is night that is here : therefore sigh and long for the dawning of that morning. Persuade yourself that the King is coming. Wait with the wearied nightwatch for the breaking of the eastern sky."

Nor let us for a moment suppose that this watching is some fantastic, transcendental frame of mind which divorces the Christian from daily work and duty. These vigils may be best kept, not in cloistered seclusion. He watches most nobly and truly, who does so, not by abstracting himself from life's rough drudgery and needful calls, but who, in the midst of the ordinary avocations of the world—amid the fever and turmoil of busy existence—can catch up the jubilant chimes wafted to the ear of faith from the bells of glory. To many such, the familiar words of the poet may be invested with a new significance as applied to the second coming :—

" There are in this loud stunning tide
 Of human care and crime,
 With whom the melodies abide
 Of th' everlasting chime."

Let these inspired utterances be ever ringing their varying magnificent melodies in our ears :—" Yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." " I will come again, and receive you unto myself." " A little

while, and ye shall not see Me; and again a little while, and ye shall see Me." "The end of all things is at hand; be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer." "Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments!" Be it ours to keep this sentinel-guard over the garments of a holy character and spotless life; jealous of the invasion of sin; realising from day to day and from hour to hour the solemn thought, "In this dress—in these garments, I must one day appear before my great Lord;" dreading the possibility, through unwatchfulness, of being deprived of any part of them, and thus of being "*ashamed before Him at His coming.*" If we expected a long-absent brother or friend from a distant land, how careful should we be in our preparations to give him welcome! How house and hall would be lustrated and adorned! How would ingenuity be taxed to deck out his chamber with every tribute which fond affection could devise! How careful to efface every association or memory of sadness, and prevent the occurrence of one note of discord or disharmony that would mar the joy of that glad return! How should it be with us, in the prospect of welcoming the Brother of brothers, the Friend of friends? How should the home of every heart be "*swept and garnished,*" decked in best holiday attire, to give to the long-absent Lord, love's most loyal welcome!

Every day is bringing that Advent nearer—lessening the span of that arc of promise. The "little while, and ye shall not see Me," is widening; the "little while, and ye shall see Me," is diminishing. The Church is like the shipmen in the Sea of Adria, who "*deemed that they*

drew near to some country." The historian of Columbus speaks thus of the great discoverer's approach to the shores of the unknown New World:—"The admiral gave orders that the sails should be close reefed and the lead kept going, and that they should sail slowly, being afraid of shoals and breakers; feeling certain that the first gleam of daybreak would discover land under their bows." Is this true in a nobler sense of "the Better country?" Are we thus on the outlook to "see the King in His beauty, and the land that is very far off?" Others may be voyaging on in guilty unpreparedness, having nothing but the prospect of being stranded in a night of darkness and despair. "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief." Let the blessed hope impart new animation and intensity to your every Christian grace, strengthening your faith, calming your fears, quickening your zeal, disarming affliction of its sting, and death itself of its brief triumph. Let each Sabbath, each providential dispensation, add new power to the summons—"Awake, awake! put on thy beautiful garments!"—"Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel!" So that when that glorious second Advent shall be consummated—when the Lord shall come and all His saints with Him—we may be able rejoicingly to exclaim, "Lo! this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord, we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation." "*Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when HE COMETH, shall find watching*"

XXI.

The Great Day of Judgment.

“AND I SAW A GREAT WHITE THRONE, AND HIM THAT SAT ON IT, FROM WHOSE FACE THE EARTH AND THE HEAVEN FLED AWAY; AND THERE WAS FOUND NO PLACE FOR THEM. AND I SAW THE DEAD, SMALL AND GREAT, STAND BEFORE GOD: AND THE BOOKS WERE OPENED; AND ANOTHER BOOK WAS OPENED, WHICH IS THE BOOK OF LIFE: AND THE DEAD WERE JUDGED OUT OF THOSE THINGS WHICH WERE WRITTEN IN THE BOOKS, ACCORDING TO THEIR WORKS. AND THE SEA GAVE UP THE DEAD WHICH WERE IN IT: AND DEATH AND HELL DELIVERED UP THE DEAD WHICH WERE IN THEM: AND THEY WERE JUDGED EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO THEIR WORKS.”—REV. XX. 11, 12, 13.

THE GREAT DAY OF JUDGMENT.

IN the previous chapter we had our attention again specially called to the theme of the Advent—the approaching consummation of all—“Behold, I come as a thief.” It was the herald-cry—“Prepare ye the way of the Lord:” “The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come.” The chariot wheels to a waiting, weary Church had long “tarried;” but they are now at hand. The warning voice need no more be sounded. The Day—that dreadful Day—“the Great Day of the Almighty”—the Day waited for by all time, is come at last,—the Day of Judgment—the Assize of God. Remembering that *we*, each one of us, will be among the myriads who will throng the area of that Great tribunal, let us with profound reverence and godly fear unfold, in brief outline, the contents of these sublime and solemn verses.

We have successively set before us—the Throne, the Judge, the Flight, the Gathering, the Books, and the final Adjudication.

(1.) *The Throne.*—Other thrones had been spoken of in the preceding part of the Apocalypse; but these have vanished. The glories of all the old empires have passed as a dream when one awaketh. All other crowns have crumbled into decay. Kings of the earth and great men

and rich men—colossal powers, political and ecclesiastical, “sitting on many waters”—have been driven like chaff before the whirlwind. “The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked and the sceptre of the rulers.” In the immediately preceding context, the throne, too, of the chief apostate Satan, the arch-usurper and arch-deceiver, who had so long held earthly kingdoms and sceptres under his vassalage, had fallen;—his iron crown had been torn for ever from his brow—his doom consummated by being cast into the lake of fire. High above this wreck of powers, human and Satanic, rises conspicuous before the Seer of Patmos the Throne of all Thrones. It is designated “a Great white throne,”—a throne of pure alabaster, corresponding with the “garment white as snow,” spoken of in the Book of Daniel, in which was attired the Ancient of Days. The colour indicates the spotless purity and justice of Him who is seated thereon, as sole, unchallenged arbiter of the eternal destinies of mankind. No other imagery could so solemnly testify to the unsullied rectitude and righteousness which will characterise the awards of that Day. As a commentator justly notes, there is here not even the emblem which is employed in the fourth chapter of this book, where there is seen surrounding the same Throne and the same Judge an encircling rainbow of emerald,—the well-known symbol of covenant-grace. The reign of grace is now over,—these rainbow-tints have melted away in the light inaccessible. Grace has descended the steps of the tribunal, and Justice has taken its place.

(2.) It is this *Judge* who next claims our thoughts:—

“ And Him that sat on it.” In one respect it is the conjoint throne of Father and Son—“ the throne,” as it is spoken of in the immediately succeeding context, “ of God and of the Lamb.” But in the truest sense it is the crowned Mediator—He who has been throughout looked and longed for as ‘ The coming One,’ who assumes by mediatorial right and prerogative the office of Supreme Judge. Other scriptures leave us in no dubiety as to this. The Divine Redeemer Himself, in the most unequivocal language, asserts and claims these judicial functions :—“ The Father hath committed all judgment unto the Son. . . . He hath given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man.” “ When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory, and before Him shall be gathered all nations.” “ It is He,” says St Peter, “ which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.” “ For,” says St Paul, “ we must all appear before the Judgment-seat of Christ.” Yet, again, in addressing his Athenian audience on the heights of Mars Hill, “ For He hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom He hath ordained.” From the expression employed in the words which follow the verses we are now considering, “ from whose *face*”—we may almost infer, that it is not God Almighty in His spiritual essence and divine glory who is to occupy in invisible majesty that august tribunal ; but rather one wearing the face and form of glorified Humanity. The present passage is antithetical to the

magnificent exordium in the first chapter—"Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also that pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him." The now deputed Judge of all, is the same Being who is there represented with a countenance like the sun shining in his strength. The Angel-intercessor before the golden altar, of a former vision, receiving the all-prayers, is now exalted in His absolute sovereignty to be the dispenser alike of punishment and reward. What greater attestation could be given to the supreme divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ than this?—"The heavens shall declare His righteousness: for God is Judge Himself." None but One invested with the Divine attributes could have the necessary qualifications for the gigantic task. *Omniscience* to take in at a glance all the crowded incidents in the histories of these countless millions;—to sift with unerring and impartial scrutiny 'the secrets of men.' *Omnipotence* to secure that none evade His summons,—or succeed, behind rock or mountain of earth or in cavern of ocean, to screen themselves from His searching, discriminating eye. Yes! "The hour is coming, in the which all that are in their graves shall hear His Voice, and shall come forth: they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."

(3.) Next, we have to note the *Flight* of the earth and heaven at this great Epiphany.—"From whose face the earth and heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them." We may perhaps best leave the in-

terpretation of these words to their own indefinite grandeur. Some commentators, in order that they may tally with their own prophetic theory, have regarded them as nothing more than highly-wrought poetic drapery, intended to indicate figuratively, the stupendous nature of the transaction described; just as physical convulsions are in other parts of this Book taken to symbolise great moral crises and catastrophes: or if there be a fleeing away of material luminaries, that it is not intended to mean any actual convulsion or displacement of the existing system; but only what we are spectators of every morning, as the moon and stars dim their pale lustres before the advancing sun—

“The Lord will come, the earth shall quake;
The mountains to their centre shake:
And withering from the vault of night,
The stars withdraw their feeble light.”

Had the words stood alone in the Apocalypse, such an interpretation might have been entertained or accepted. But in the light of other passages of Scripture we are driven to conclude, that they refer to a literal dislocation and dismemberment of the present economy—“a dissolution of the present *cosmos*,”—preliminary to renovation and renewal. The parallel words of St Peter’s unfigurative Epistle, are too strong and decided to warrant any more modified interpretation, “The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.”

(4.) We have the *Gathering*—“And I saw the dead,

small and great, stand before God." What a concourse! All who have ever trod the earth, from the first to the last member of the human race. No conventional human distinctions can plead exemption. Rich and poor—young and old—learned and unlearned—peasant and peer—king and beggar. It matters not where or when they have lived; whether when the world was young, or in its colossal manhood and maturity, or in its years of decrepitude and decay; whether their home was amid the burning deserts of the tropics or amid polar snows—the icebergs of eternal winter; whether amid the hum of busy cities, or the stillness of mountain solitudes. It matters not what their name, or rank, or colour of skin, or age, or pedigree. Tyrants who have made the world to tremble; Nimrods in the race of fame, and riches, and conquest; cottagers unknown beyond their village home; the hoary pilgrim of four-score years; the little child laid in its early grave. The sea is represented in the following verse as surrendering its dead—giving up what for ages it has held in custody,—the myriad sleepers in its still silent caverns,—those who have gone down amid the moaning of the tempest with the costly freight, or amid the tug of grappling irons and the roar of battle;—or the wasted invalid who had fallen into the last long sleep far away from the graves of his forefathers. Death and Hades, too, are in the same verse, by a bold personification, represented as twin demons surrendering their captive prisoners with reluctant grasp, whether from storied urn and marble mausoleum, or from the heaps of the battlefield, or the

winding-sheet of Alpine snows, or the churchyard's unepitaphed mounds: all will be there in that teeming mass of immortality. Vain will be the attempt to escape or evade the scrutiny. A previous figuration of this same Book has represented the sinner calling on the rocks and mountains to fall upon him, that he may be hidden and covered from the face of the Judge. But their adamant ears are deaf to pity; loyal to their great Creator, they refuse to forsake their old moorings:—they leave the suppliant to wail out the unsuccoured cry, “Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from Thy presence.”

(5.) We have next the opening of *the Books*—“And the Books were opened, and another Book was opened which is the Book of life.” The imagery is borrowed from human tribunals, where, in the case of the panel sisted at the bar, a written or printed indictment is produced. These ‘books,’ or rolls, or registers, described here, embody this indictment. They contain all the charges that can be laid against the sinner. They have engrossed and catalogued in their infallible pages, all the deeds which have been committed by every single individual of that mighty assembled aggregate. How scrupulously minute each such biography will be! details in the life-story that have long ago passed into oblivion, but which now, like the undeveloped photograph, start into life on exposure to the sunlight! Sins of thought that never embodied themselves in deed. The unchaste look, the envious glance, the muffled resentment, the harboured malice, the uncharitable wish, of which none but the eye of the

Unseen and the All-seeing took cognizance. How will the guilty footsteps be retraced on the sands, which the tidal wave of oblivion was thought to have effaced for ever! how will the tale be engraven as with an iron pen on these enduring tablets, as to the means by which many dragged themselves or dragged others downwards to ruin! Volumes of recorded sin which were thought long ago to have perished in the flames, or their leaves to have mouldered and been moth-eaten, they discover have all been laid up in the library of God; and one by one is brought down—every line and every entry read before men and angels. The blasphemous oath uttered in a moment of fiery passion—read out! The successful lie which screened a deed of dishonesty or fraud—read out! The stab at their neighbour's good name and reputation to exalt their own—read out! The deed of darkness and villany, of which they thought the stars alone were the unconscious witnesses—read out! In that hour there will come forth the writing of a man's hand, as of old at Belshazzar's feast, on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace. Nothing is now hid that shall not then be known. The Divine saying will then be invested with new and awful emphasis and meaning—“All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”

But “another book is opened, which is the Book of Life.” In that Book the names of the saved are written. It would be presumptuous to speak confidently or dogmatically with regard to the precise nature of this volume and its relation to the others just adverted to. It is

supposed by some to be the register, not only of the names of God's spiritual Israel, but to contain an enumeration of the services rendered by them to their heavenly Master; and thus, while the entries of previous books will regulate and adjust the retributive sentences to be pronounced on the ungodly, the Book of Life will regulate the graduating scale of rewards in the case of the righteous.

(6.) This, at all events, is the next point spoken of, the final *Adjudication*, embracing the case alike of sinner and saint—"And the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, *according to their works.*" That throne and judicature will be an equitable tribunal. The sentences of the Great Judge will not be arbitrary; each one will be scrupulously and exactly weighed and meted out. To this principle of retribution we have recently been led to advert in connection with another 'Memory of Patmos.' It was announced in unmistakable words by the Great Apostle—"Who will render to every man according to his deeds. To them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, (He will render) eternal life: but unto them that are contentious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, (He will render) indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil" (Rom. ii. 6-8). And yet again (in 2 Cor. v. 10)—"For we must all appear before the Judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." While the thought of just and

equitable retribution ought, to the sinner, to be a solemn and appalling one, should it not form also, in the case of every true believer, a quickening motive and incentive, that the allotments of eternity will be the counterpart of the deeds and doings of time; his everlasting recompense will be in accordance with the measure of fidelity which has regulated the discharge of his earthly trust. In the last chapter of Revelation, where the Divine Redeemer again strikes the key-note of the book, and reveals Himself as the quickly 'Coming one,' where He is speaking, too, specially, if not exclusively, to His own people, He affirms this same truth—"Behold, I come quickly, *and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be*" (xxii. 12). Reader, what is it that fires men's ambition in this world?—the beast of heraldry, the pomp of power, the lust of conquest, the triumphs and trophies of intellect, the love of fame, the thirst for riches. But what are these, all combined? baseless nothings, compared to the honour and privilege of him who has his name written in the Book of Life, and who, by reason of that very enfranchisement, is "the rather" giving all diligence to make his calling and election sure; adding to his faith virtue, and knowledge, and temperance, and patience, and every Christian grace (2 Peter i. 5-10). Everything else perishes with the present; but the wealth of holy character—that is enduring. It alone knows no bankruptcy: it alone owns no decay.

Space forbids farther to dwell on these sublime and awful picturings of the great terminating act in the terrestrial

drama—the close of the present dispensation. Some philosophers of our own time may throw doubt on the question of future retribution as one which they have ventured to call “insoluble to human creatures.” And yet it is strange to find modern scepticism thus lagging behind even the old philosophy of heathen nations. They at least had groped their way, through the darkness, to their own solution of the problem, and admitted no such insolubility. The dreams of Pagan mythology recognised alike the gloom of Tartarus and the bliss of Elysium. Even the wits of Athens, as a writer notes, who scouted and scorned Paul’s doctrine of the “resurrection of the dead,” offered no denial to his assertion that “God would judge the world in righteousness.” And when the same apostle subsequently brought the same great theme before a profligate Roman—“the judgment to come,” Felix trembled! In every human bosom, be it Christian or Pagan, savage or civilised, there is a consciousness of right and wrong, a recognition of moral responsibility. The coming tribunal of a last Judgment has its harbinger and preliminary in the miniature court of conscience here. The solemn adjudications of the Great Day come floating up the ages. So that despite of all infidel creeds and the rejection of the authority and inspiration of the written Word, conscience brings many a man, in his more earnest and sober moments, to subscribe the saying of Solomon, “God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.” Add to this, and apart also from the unfoldings of revealed truth, we have the

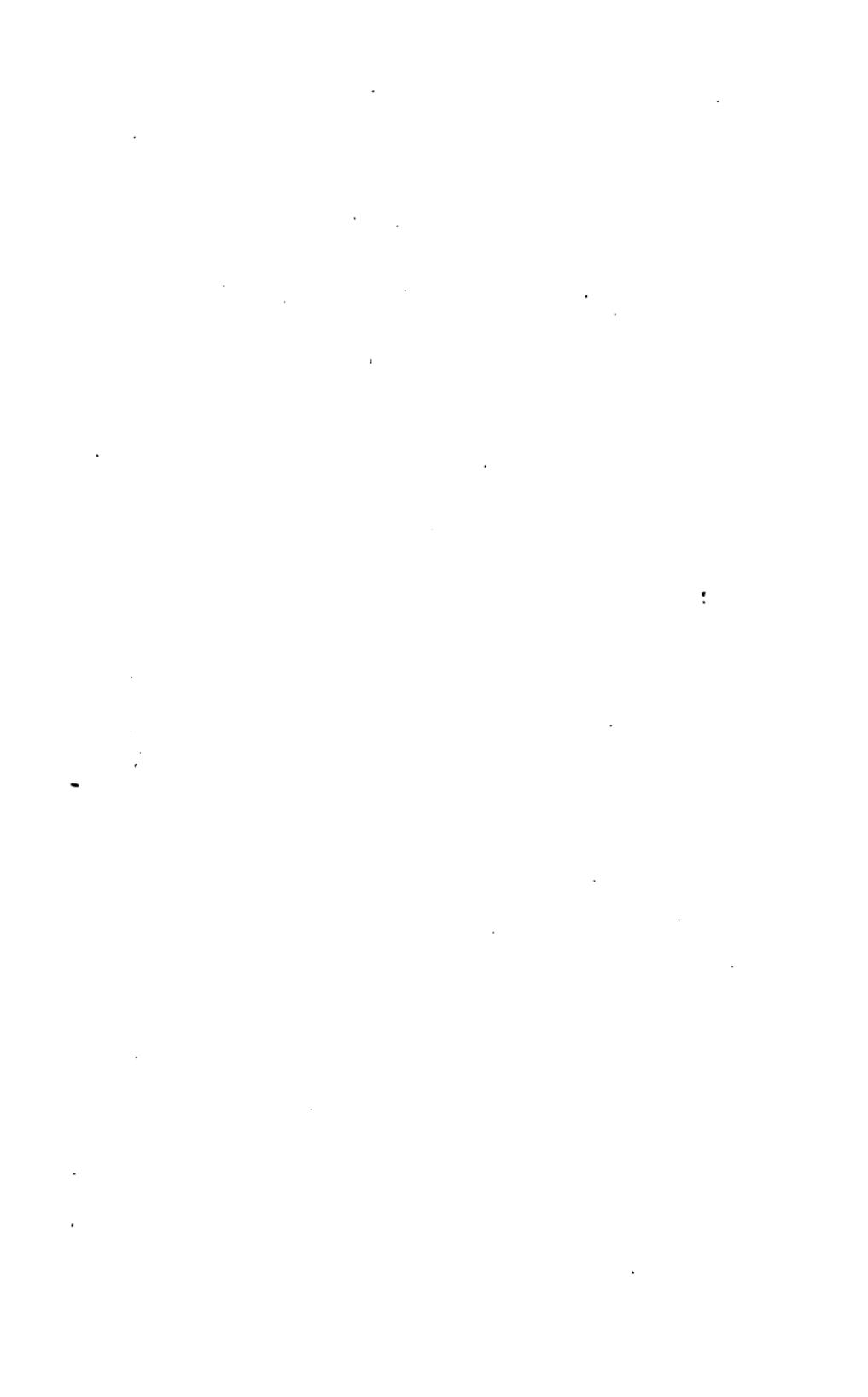
strongest presumptive expectation of a future retributive economy, from the fact of the present unequal distribution of happiness and misery, and its probable, or rather its certain rectification and adjustment hereafter. Who is not cognizant, every day, of instances of vice pampered and caressed, and on the other hand, of goodness and beneficence and virtue trampled on and overborne? We see, in one case, a creature of God, who has belied His image,—some miserable and depraved victim of selfishness, and baseness, and lust, scattering nothing but baneful influences around him,—“earthly, sensual, devilish,”—yet, with the cup of material plenty filled to the brim; the world smiling on him; wealth unimpaired; an apparently enviable and envied child of prosperity. While on the other hand, we see, it may be in the adjoining house or street, some lofty, pure, generous, unselfish spirit, but on whom the arrows of misfortune, one after another, have been emptied from God’s quiver. Is it the widow in her agony, bereft of husband and children, health and means; hurried by successive bereavement into pitiless and broken-hearted penury, and weeping over the helpless orphans she has to cast unbefriended on the world. Oh forbid the thought, that a kind, and just, and righteous God would suffer such anomalies, were there no Day coming when these discrepancies would be rectified, these inequalities adjusted; when the villain who walked now unchallenged in his villainies, would at last be visited with his long-delayed penalty; and when the pining flower of goodness and virtue, that had nothing now but rude tempests and withered scat-

tered blossoms, would be suffered to waft its fragrance in a more genial clime ! Abraham's philosophy has an echo and response in every bosom and in every age, " Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right." But though we thus conceive that this question of a coming retribution *is* soluble alike by reason and conscience, and on the principles of eternal rectitude, we have a more sure word of prophecy to which we do well to take heed. " The word that I speak unto thee," says Christ, " the same shall judge every man at the last day." Revelation leaves us without excuse. Not in all questions certainly, but in this, at least, it endorses out and out the findings of reason. They both set their seal to the one immutable and equitable principle which is to regulate the decisions of that Day—" He that is unjust let him be unjust still ; and he which is filthy let him be filthy still ; and he that is righteous let him be righteous still ; and he that is holy let him be holy still ! "

What more need be added, but to urge preparation for that august gathering—" Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision ;"—each standing in his lot at the end of the days ;—his weal or woe for eternity unchangeably fixed. We would not, if we could, enter on the undefined awfulness of the words embraced in this same passage, ' The second death,' and ' the lake of fire.' It is enough that they describe the unutterable anguish of a spirit born for immortality and for union with the divine, having, by its own recklessness and guilt, lost its glorious centre, and left in self-abandonment to drift away an outcast from bliss. " The second death ! " It tells of the

extinction of true life and gladdening hope ;—no memories but the poor memory, it may be, of having gained the world, but at the priceless uncomputed sacrifice of losing the soul. A solitary, isolated being, with the blank of despair around him, above him, beneath him, within him : the spectral forms of his own sins, the sole companions of that infinite of darkness ; and the crushing, withering reflection ever present, that he was himself alone responsible for the undoing of his eternity !

But we shall not enlarge. With these awful words, and this awful vision, the terrors of the Book close. The curtain once more falls amid these thunderings, and lightnings, and tempests ; when it rises again, it is to unfold the gladdening pictures of the two last chapters ; a glorious burst of heavenly sunlight after the thick darkness. The seer of Patmos has concluded his record of the Church's conflicts, and trials, and persecutions, and the condign punishment to be inflicted on her enemies. Nothing now remains, but that to which the whole preceding figurations tended—the Revelation of the new heavens and the new earth, the dwelling-place of the Redeemed. The storms are all past, every wave is stilled, the haven is in sight :—“ Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” At the close of this chapter, we seem to be in the position of Christian and Hopeful in the Pilgrim’s Progress ; “ They had the city itself in view, and they thought they heard all the bells therein to ring, to welcome them thereunto.” When we resume these “ Memories,” it will be to “ enter within the gate into the city.”



XXII.

The New Heaven and the New Earth.

“ AND I SAW A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH : FOR THE FIRST HEAVEN AND THE FIRST EARTH WERE PASSED AWAY ; AND THERE WAS NO MORE SEA. AND I JOHN SAW THE HOLY CITY, NEW JERUSALEM, COMING DOWN FROM GOD OUT OF HEAVEN, PREPARED AS A BRIDE ADORNED FOR HER HUSBAND. AND I HEARD A GREAT VOICE OUT OF HEAVEN, SAYING, BE-HOLD, THE TABERNACLE OF GOD IS WITH MEN, AND HE WILL DWELL WITH THEM, AND THEY SHALL BE HIS PEOPLE, AND GOD HIMSELF SHALL BE WITH THEM, AND BE THEIR GOD. AND GOD SHALL WIPE AWAY ALL TEARS FROM THEIR EYES ; AND THERE SHALL BE NO MORE DEATH, NEITHER SORROW, NOR CRYING, NEITHER SHALL THERE BE ANY MORE PAIN : FOR THE FORMER THINGS ARE PASSED AWAY. . . . AND THERE CAME UNTO ME ONE OF THE SEVEN ANGELS WHICH HAD THE SEVEN VIALS FULL OF THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES, AND TALKED WITH ME, SAYING, COME HITHER, I WILL SHOW THEE THE BRIDE, THE LAMB’S WIFE. AND HE CARRIED ME AWAY IN THE SPIRIT TO A GREAT AND HIGH MOUNTAIN, AND SHOWED ME THAT GREAT CITY, THE HOLY JERUSALEM, DESCENDING OUT OF HEAVEN FROM GOD, HAVING THE GLORY OF GOD : AND HER LIGHT WAS LIKE UNTO A STONE MOST PRECIOUS, EVEN LIKE A JASPER-STONE, CLEAR AS CRYSTAL ; AND HAD A WALL GREAT AND HIGH, AND HAD TWELVE GATES, AND AT THE GATES TWELVE ANGELS, AND NAMES WRITTEN THEREON, WHICH ARE THE NAMES OF THE TWELVE TRIBES OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL. . . . AND THE TWELVE GATES WERE TWELVE PEARLS ; EVERY SEVERAL GATE WAS OF ONE PEARL : AND THE STREET OF THE CITY WAS PURE GOLD, AS IT WERE TRANSPARENT GLASS. . . . AND THE GATES OF IT SHALL NOT BE SHUT AT ALL BY DAY : FOR THERE SHALL BE NO NIGHT THERE. AND THEY SHALL BRING THE GLORY AND HONOUR OF THE NATIONS INTO IT. AND THERE SHALL IN NO WISE ENTER INTO IT ANY THING THAT DEFILETH, NEITHER WHATSOEVER WORKETH ABOMINATION, OR MAKETH A LIE ; BUT THEY WHICH ARE WRITTEN IN THE LAMB’S BOOK OF LIFE.”—REV. XXL 1-4, 9-12, 21, 25-27.

THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH.

WE have reached the concluding act in the great drama
—“THE THINGS WHICH SHALL BE HEREAFTER.”

The number of God’s elect is accomplished ; the bridal day of the Church Triumphant has at last arrived—the consummated bliss of Christ and His people. It is the clear shining after rain ; the morning without clouds ;—“the darkness is past and the true light shineth.” All the apocalyptic scenery regarding the Church Militant terminates with the previous chapter. All its fierce Armageddons are fought ;—the great assize is dissolved ;—the Books are closed,—the inquiry hushed,—the wide moral gulph is fixed for ever. The Evangelist is now represented standing like another Noah on the heights of Ararat, gazing on a renovated world. After passing through the crucible of its own latent fires, it has come forth, phoenix-like, from their ashes in new resurrection-attire. On the occasion of the deluge, although a vast aqueous mass rolled over the surface, or part of the surface of the globe, submerging its hills and valleys, this did not involve the destruction of the planet. It rose rather from its water-baptism clad in fresh loveliness and verdure. So, we have strong reason to believe, will it be in this second and last fiery baptism. The earth will be in a state of fusion ;—the elements “melting with the

fervent heat" (2 Pet. iii. 12.) ;—the now imprisoned fires sweeping over its surface, charring its forests, and calcining its rocks. But though there will be displacement, dislocation, decomposition, there will be no annihilation;—these will be no more than igneous purifiers, from which it will come forth, new created,—attired in more than pristine beauty. Travellers, who have ascended Vesuvius, tell us that some of the old lava-channels, which years ago poured down their molten streams of destruction, are now covered with luxuriant vines and purple clusters. So will it be on a vast, gigantic scale, with this world and its thousand volcanoes of living fire. Life and luxuriance will once more clothe its seamed and smitten sides. From that tremendous conflagration will emerge "a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." One speciality alone is here noted in its altered physical aspect, that there will be "no more sea." These last fires have dried up the watery element—redeemed from blank those vast solitudes of ocean, which now often form a rampart, preventing the brotherhood of nations. The world's habitable platform being thus indefinitely widened and expanded, room will be made for all "the nations of the saved."

Say not these picturings of a renewed and renovated earth are too strange and incredible facts for human belief. They are not a whit more so than other Scriptural revelations dearest to our hopes and encircling our every thought of the future. Not more strange, surely, is the astounding truth that the body laid in the grave—

resolved into its primeval clay—mouldering in insensate dust—is one day to rise exultant from the tomb, its pulses beating with immortality: not more strange is the fact of the unsightly seed or grain, embedded in the ground, springing up in graceful and multiplied form;—or the dull, torpid, loathsome chrysalis, bursting its dark prison-house and soaring aloft in varied and brilliant hue;—not more strange or unaccountable are any of these, than that this earth, convulsed, shattered, disorganised—a wreck of matter—shall emerge from its grave, in holiday attire,—break from its chrysalis shell, radiant with beauty, “like the wings of a dove, covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.”

In the present chapter, we have brought before us, in succession, what the Apostle *saw* and what he *heard*. In other words, we have THE PICTURE, or what was presented to his eye; and THE VOICE, or what was addressed to his ear.

In vision, John stands on the bare, naked platform of the new heavens and the new earth, over which we may imagine the morning stars are again singing together, and all the sons of God are shouting for joy. As he gazes—lo! a resplendent city, and one of gigantic proportions, with towers, walls, and gates—reminding him, at a glance, of his own loved Jerusalem—seems slowly and magnificently to descend from the upper heavens. At first, as if dazzled with the sight, and awed by the august voices which accompany and follow, he ventures on no description. By and by, however, in a subsequent verse, he is

conducted by an angel—a bright inhabitant from the spirit-world—to a great and high mountain. From this height he obtains a more thorough survey. He marks that the city was four square ;—that it has twelve gates, each gate sentinelled by angels ;—that these gates are never shut at all by day, seeing that the city itself is bathed in a flood of everlasting brightness ; “ for there is no night there.” All the costliest material—gold and crystal, and every stone of priceless value, from the jasper to the amethyst, are employed as the earthly symbols and exponents of a glory which cannot otherwise be translated into human language.

What unutterable thoughts must have thrilled through the beloved Disciple’s soul at that moment of all moments. For what *was* that moment ? It was the fulfilment, in vision, of all his life-long prayers and longings. It was the birthday of the perfected Church. Amid the crowding reflections which rushed to his mind on the figurative descent of this new Jerusalem, his memory seems at the instant to travel back to the streets of the old Jerusalem. He thinks of solemn words uttered by Divine lips within view of its towers and temples—“ *Behold the bridegroom cometh !* ” The new city suggests the emblem of the sacred parable. The Bridegroom *has* come. The last vision in the chapter preceding, was of the Judge seated on His throne. But now that enthroned Lord has left the judgment-hall for the coronation-hall. The Day of everlasting espousals has arrived. Make way for the Bride the Lamb’s wife !—the glorified Church without spot or blemish or any such thing. “ The new heaven and

the new earth" are her royal bridal chamber. "I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, *prepared as a bride adorned for her husband!*"

Such, then, was the *Picture* which rose before the enraptured eye of the seer of Patmos.

Having sought briefly to describe what John's eyes saw, let us now turn to what his ears heard; let us turn from the *Picture* to the *great Voice*. And the evangelist spectator is not now forbidden, as on a former occasion, to "write." When the seven thunders uttered their voices, after the appearance of the rainbow-crowned angel as detailed in the tenth chapter, and when he was about to transcribe, a prohibition was addressed from heaven, "Write not." No such arrest is at present put upon his hand. It is the reverse. He receives the positive instruction in ver. 5 from the great Judge Himself—"Write; for these words are true and faithful." God graciously authorises him to pen the glorious revelation for the comfort of His Church in every age. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

The utterance of the unknown Speaker contains a beautiful twofold description of the citizen's felicity.

First, we have a *positive* description of what that bliss is to comprehend; and second, a *negative*. The *positive*—"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." The *negative*

—“And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying ; neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away.” We shall in the present chapter confine ourselves to the former.

The essence of this positive bliss is, yet again, to consist (in what we have had occasion to note more than once as a main characteristic of heavenly felicity set forth in previous visions), *the everlasting presence and enjoyment of God Himself*. That holy city, new Jerusalem, descends, but it descends not alone. The name of the city from that day shall be *Jehovah Shammah*—“The *LORD* is there.” The children of Zion are joyful in their King.

Farther, does not this passage seem strongly to indicate, that the Great God of heaven designs to make the new redeemed earth the future abode of the Shekinah,—His own palatial residence, the special seat of His vast empire, the metropolis of eternity? “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men.” Just as Jerusalem—the first Holy city—was the sacred capital, the seat of the theocratic government,—so this “holy city, new Jerusalem,” the home of the Church triumphant, would seem destined to be the future capital of a rejoicing universe. Jehovah is to transfer the pavilion of His heavenly glory to His ransomed world. (Verse 5.) There is a *throne* in the city ; “and He that sat upon the throne said, ‘Behold I make all things new.’”

In one beautiful sense, indeed, already may it be said, with reference to Christ’s incarnation, that the TABERNACLE of God has been with men. Jesus, the incarnate Son, pitched His tabernacle in the midst of human tents.

“The Word,” says St John in his Gospel, “came and dwelt (or lit. *tented*) among us.” And it is this sublime antecedent fact which disarms the other of any marvel and incredibility; nay, which, indeed, would almost render appropriate and befitting the transference of which we speak, of God’s manifested presence from the invisible heaven to the visible platform of a regenerated earth. We cease to wonder at the bestowment of peerless honours on a world that was selected, amid a wide sisterhood of planets, for such a marvellous display of love and mercy as in the atonement and death of the Prince of Life and Lord of Glory. If it be the case (as we know on Scripture authority it is) that God passed by the angels that sinned—and as the word literally means, those, too, highest in state, principal in rank—the aristocracy of heaven;* if God passed by *them*, “taking not hold† of angels, but of the seed of Abraham;” if He selected this insignificant world of ours on which to uprear that wondrous cross, and make it the theatre of His Son’s *humiliation*;—is there any improbability, rather, is there not the strongest presumptive *probability*, that He may convert the scene of surpassing abasement and suffering into the scene of honour and exaltation; and to principalities and powers in heavenly places make known by the Church (the Church redeemed and glorified) His own manifold wisdom? There would, we confess, have been something almost transcending belief, in the thought of this earth being thus marked out for such peculiar and pre-eminent distinction, if we had not the antecedents of Gethsemane and Calvary.

* *ἀρχῆς*.

† See marginal reading.

But after the great “mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh,” we can marvel at no other mysteries ; nay, we seem to see a sublime congruity in the world where the God-man suffered, being the spot where the God-man glorified is eternally to reign. “Why leap ye” (why look ye with envy) “ye high hills? *This* is the hill which God desireth to dwell in ; yea, the Lord will dwell in it for ever.” *

But we shall not farther expand this thought. For, after all, the mere locality is comparatively immaterial. More momentous, delightful, and comforting is the great truth we have found so often reiterated in these visions, as forming the main element in the bliss of the ransomed citizens—viz., that God is in their midst. Twice over in one verse is it here said, “He will dwell with them,” “God shall be with them ;” or, as that may be rendered, “He shall be God, with them :”—the fully verified meaning and interpretation of “IMMANUEL” (God with us). It has been beautifully said, that just as every lovely and varied tint in field and flower is traced to the one pure, parent, colourless ray,—so every gate and jasper wall and sapphire pavement in that jewelled city, owe their brilliancy and glory to the altogether lovely One, “the Light which no man can approach unto.” Oh, wondrous assemblage! Oh, amazing honours! The tabernacle of the great God with redeemed men! As the ranks of the *unredeemed* (cherubim and seraphim) gather around the Holy city—hovering with their bright wings over the new Jerusalem

* See a discourse on this subject, by the late Dr Stratten.

—we can picture them exclaiming, in a higher sense than the words ever bore on earth, “How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel !” *

We have room for only one other point in the suggestive themes of these verses;—the near and intimate fellowship which is to subsist between the ransomed multitude and their God, farther brought out in the additional strong and expressive language,—“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” What meaneth this? Tears, we need not say, there can be none in heaven. The symbol must be explained by reference to some earthly feelings. It has been truthfully observed by an expositor of this passage—his remark, we think, furnishes the right key to the interpretation of the figure—that “the most sacred test of affection is to wipe away a tear.” It is indeed the most delicate of all offices one human being can perform towards another, that of offering sympathy in seasons of tearful sorrow. The most experienced “sons of consolation” can testify, that the more they venture to come into personal contact with aching hearts, and to cross thresholds darkened with bereavement, the more do they feel the awful

* It is noted by Bishop Wordsworth, that “the gates of the heavenly City are not called by the word usually employed to describe the gates of a *City* (*πόλις*), which never occurs in the Apocalypse, but by *πύλαντες*, which occurs *eleven times*, and which commonly, and always in the other Books of the New Testament, signifies the gate of a *house*. See Matt. xxvi. 71; Luke xvi. 20; Acts x. 17; xii. 13, 14; xiv. 13. The *City* of the Heavenly Jerusalem, although it is described here as of immense size (v. 17), is but *one House*. All will dwell together as brethren, as children of the same *Heavenly Father*, in one *Everlasting Home*. ‘In my Father’s *House* are many mansions’ (John xiv. 2). ”

solemnity of the ground ; that sorrow is a thing of that exquisite tenderness that no stranger dare intermeddle with it. Every bereft spirit will respond to words of an earnest writer, who evidently knows well what a sacred thing it is to give sympathy ; or, in the significant figure now before us, to “wipe away a tear :”—“Oh, the preciousness of silence in the hour of heart-cutting grief ! Oh, the misery of the minstrels and people making a noise ! Oh, the jarring discord of voluble sympathy ! Oh, the bitter mockery of commonplace condolence ! Oh, for those who know how to speak with the pressure of the hand ; for those to whom God has given the mute eloquence of the eye ; for those who do not pretend to understand our grief !” Yes, we repeat, it is no ordinary one—no ordinary friend—who can dare touch these harp-strings of sorrow. There *are* indeed such, in seasons of deep desolation, whom we love to welcome into the smitten home ; there *are* hands we love on such occasions to press. While drawing back from the cold commonplace contact of ordinary routine sympathy, there are those to whom, in this significant language of St John, we gratefully entrust the wiping away of the gathering or falling tear. Such, however, is the prerogative alone of true and faithful, of tried and tested friendship and love. ‘Behold,’ says John, in the expressive figure of this passage, ‘Behold the endearing relationship which will subsist between God and the believer in that Holy city. They will confide in Him as lovingly and tenderly, as the bereft one on earth who suffers the hand of human affection to wipe the tear-dimmed eye !’

Are we looking for this city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God? Amid the other gorgeous symbolism, do we keep in mind that which has met us under various figures in previous descriptions, and which is suggested here under a new one,—its “street of pure gold like to transparent glass;”—that vast as are its dimensions,—a gigantic cube, lying four-square, with gates in every quarter, wide open for the ingress of every tribe of God’s spiritual Israel,—yet within it “there entereth nothing that defileth.” Nations of the saved are to be welcomed in,—yet there is one badge of citizenship indispensable in the case of every unit in these teeming millions;—“the pure in heart” alone can “see God.” The sentinel angels at every watch-tower have the old prophetic summons addressed to them, “Open ye the gates, that the *righteous* nation which keepeth the truth may enter in” (Isa. xxvi. 2). Over every entrance is the superscription, “This Gate of the Lord into which the *Righteous* shall enter:”—“Blessed are they that *do His commandments*, . . . that they may enter in through the gates into the city.” *The City which hath foundations!* There are no permanent foundations for anything here. Here we have no “continuing city.” Earth’s most stable social and domestic structures are sand-built, not rock-built. They are at the mercy of every capricious hurricane; and death, sooner or later, will convert them into a mass of ruins. Let us seek to live under the elevating assurance, that we are the chartered, and the soon to be glorified inhabitants of this new Jerusalem: taking as our motto, “Pilgrims

and Strangers on the earth," "our citizenship is in Heaven." Let us live up to our peerless privileges, as those who in the future are to dwell with Him who has promised to be with us and to be our God. If trial be appointed;—the loss of earthly friends—earthly portions;—be it ours to fall back from the wreck and bankruptcy of the present, on the glorious reversion. Let us take down our harp from the willows; and sing, it may be amid withered props and perishable refuges—amid rifled homes and falling tears and the shadows of death,—“ Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called *our* God, for **HE HATH PREPARED FOR US A CITY !**”



XXIII.

No Death: No Sorrow: No Crying:
No Pain.

"AND THERE SHALL BE NO MORE DEATH, NEITHER SORROW, NOR CRYING,
NEITHER SHALL THERE BE ANY MORE PAIN: FOR THE FORMER THINGS
ARE PASSED AWAY."—REV. XXI. 4.

NO DEATH : NO SORROW : NO CRYING : NO PAIN.

IN already considering the representation given by the Apostle of Patmos of the New Heaven and the New Earth, "the holy city, New Jerusalem, descending out of Heaven from God,"—we confined our attention to the *positive* elements of bliss in store for the Church of the glorified, as these are described in the verse immediately preceding :—" And I heard a great voice out of Heaven saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God ; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

We come now to the *negative* description which John gives of that same blessedness. It is a fourfold delineation. He conducts us in thought, first, down to Earth, and exhibits a hall or picture-gallery, whose gloomy recesses are hung with representations of *Death* ; *Sorrow* ; *Crying* ; *Pain* ; and then, taking us to the New Jerusalem, we find, if we may so express it, the corresponding recesses in its glorious walls are blank :—" There shall be *no more* death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away."

These in their order :—

I. There shall be no more *Death*. We must, in the first instance, visit the Earth and pace its corridor of gloomy cartoons. It contains a vast gathering of divers and ever-varying delineations. Here is a picture of old age, one who has lived beyond the appointed fourscore years—his brow furrowed with wrinkles, “gathering up his feet into the bed.” Here is manhood in its prime, with eye apparently undimmed and natural force unabated, bidding farewell to those who are soon to be fatherless. Here is a mother pressing a blighted flower to her bosom. Here is a king borne from his sackclothed palace, a mourning nation following the bier. Here is the friendless beggar carried from his couch of loneliness and penury to the last narrow home of all. Here is the Philanthropist, the widow and orphaned children lining the streets as the funeral cortege passes, and pronouncing the mute panegyric with their tears. Here is the strong swimmer in his agony resigning himself to his inevitable fate. Here the companion-picture, as from the side of a vessel the coffin is lowered into the silent depths where no epitaph can be written, nor footstep follow, nor tear fall. Here is the captive in his cell, uttering alone his last appeal to Heaven, with no human eye to cheer him, and no human hand to smooth his straw pillow. Here is hapless courage, lying on its crimson shroud, deaf to the roar of battle, amid heaps of slain. Here is the drunkard, with the drained cup at his side and delirium in his eye. Here is the bold sceptic, the defiant reprobate, the scorner of grace, with haggard look, gazing on the sand-glass at his side, wearying for the expiry of its wasted grains. Here is the Believer,

his lips moving in their last prayer, his eyes closing in their last slumber gently as an infant's sleep ; while white-robed angels hover over his pillow ready to bear the soul to Paradise.

But why linger in these corridors ? They are co-extensive with all time. Every second, it has been computed, a fresh picture is thrown off for their sombre walls. At every beat of our pulse a death takes place. The Rider on the Pale Horse has never slackened his speed since the hour of the fall. Death hath passed upon all. Every household has its saddened memories. What circle is there where there is no name mentioned with faltering lips ? What fold among us but misses its lamb ? What family Bible but has the significant record under a cherished entry ? Who has not pressed the cold hand ? Who has not watched "life balanced in a breath,"—the dwindling candle-flame flickering in the socket ? Who has not contributed a loved portrait to the silent gallery ? Who has not chiselled names fragrant with affection on monumental tablets ? And if, in some rare exceptions, the great foe of human happiness has not yet come, who among us has not the dread anticipation for ourselves or for others of the inevitable hour ? Who has never been a prey to the disquieting thought of the unheralded footfall—the sudden incursion of nature's great midnight robber ? But in Heaven "there shall be no more *Death*." In that Holy City, New Jerusalem, there shall be no death-gallery—no chamber of terrors—no limner—no pigment—no canvas to delineate them. No "loved and lost" there ; but all loved and restored,

never to be lost again—the iron crown of the King of Terrors trampled for ever in the dust. The Believer, the glorified citizen, will there reign in life—wear the diadem of immortal being, sealed by the mighty Angel who has in his hand “the seal of the life-giving God!” Oh, blessed, comforting thought!—the very fear of this last enemy felt and dreaded no more—the saying brought to pass, as it is written, “**DEATH** is swallowed up in **Victory.**”

II. There shall be no *Sorrow* there. Descend we yet again to Earth’s picture-gallery. We are taken now to a silent, secluded, lonely spot. The hush of sacredness and privacy is here. The former corridor we trod, is patent to the observation of all. Ah! it cannot be hidden; it cometh with observation: the muffled bell—the darkened window—the mournful procession—the sombre attire—the missed face in the exchange, the street, the home, the House of God. But there are often pictures of hidden grief, hung away from public view in the secret chambers of the heart. The saddest spectacles of earth are not those unfolded to the eye. There are scenes with a screen drawn before them, which are not for public gaze. They are kept with key and padlock; the gallery is paced with silent footstep and bated breath. It is this hidden, muffled, unuttered grief which we believe is here referred to in the word “*Sorrow.*” Are there none whose eyes trace these pages, who know of such pictures that are frescoed,—deeply-embedded in the walls of their inmost heart? That cutting disappoint-

ment of young and ardent affection—that cruel withering of a cherished gourd—that faithless wound of your trusted friend—that base requital of long-tried friendship—that unkind stab on reputation? Or, more painful still; as we pass to Sorrow's most secluded, shadiest niche:—that blot on character:—that prodigal boy:—that picture of lost virtue and blighted innocence:—that castaway on his plank:—that ship, that abandoned lonely hulk, without mast or sail or rudder or living thing, drifting, drifting away on the surges of despair!

In that city of God there shall be no more *Sorrow*. These pictures shall be burnt to ashes with the last funeral fires of Time. No sad realities, no sad memories can be perpetuated on the walls of Heaven. To take an illustration from the photographic art. The developed sun-picture remains on the plate, while it is preserved in a dark chamber. But expose it without using the fixing solutions to the light, it immediately fogs and evaporates; every trace of it is lost. So with these pictures of *Sorrow*. Remove them from this dark world and its gloomy corridors; expose them to the eternal sunshine of Heaven, where the darkness is past and the true light shineth; they are gone,—not a vestige of sadness is left. “There shall be no more sorrow;” the former things are passed away.

III. There shall “be no more *Crying*.” Enter another room in the Earthly gallery. John could doubtless understand, better than we, the meaning and appropriateness of the expression here employed with reference

to this next chamber. It is an oriental corridor. In these eastern countries a wild demonstrative grief was often indulged in, as it is to this day. With us, it is otherwise. Our homes of sorrow are seldom or never scenes of frantic and uncontrollable anguish. The smitten heart rather retires within itself, seeks the sacred calm of its own chamber, and utters its plaint in silent tears. Perhaps its sorrow is all the profounder and more real on this account: like the deepest stream, it has least sound. It is different with other nations, and specially the Asiatics. Their funerals, as we know from a Gospel picture, were accompanied with "the minstrels and people making a noise." When the first-born in Egypt were found dead, there was "a loud cry," we read, that went up throughout all the land of Egypt. Doubtless, that night when Israel marched forth in the darkness, they would be met at every step by bereaved mothers having dust on their heads and sackcloth on their loins;—beating their breasts, and making the still air resound with the dirge of woe. When Herod executed the cruel decree of slaughtering all the infant children of Bethlehem,—"In Rama there was a voice heard, lamentation and weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they were not." The voice of these bereft Hebrew mothers is represented as waking the echoes of the death-stricken land. By a bold figure or impersonation, Rachel is represented rising from her grave, as if her ashes were stirred by the cry of blood, and seating herself amid the murdered innocents, indulging in a wild and inconsolable lament.

We may take perhaps the *Crying* (*κραυγὴ*), spoken of here, more truthfully still, as denoting aggregate mourning; the loud shout or wailing of numbers, in contradistinction to the individual and personal woes indicated by the previous word *Sorrow*. Such was the howl which reached the ear of the wakeful prophets of Israel, rising throughout the land at the approach of the hosts of Sennacherib. Such was the shriek (as the word literally means) which arose from Philistia on the approach of the same colossal invader, “Howl, O gate; cry, O city: thou, whole Palestina, art dissolved.” Such was the shout of wailing that rose from desolate Moab in that night of horrors, when, by mercenary and sanguinary Arab hordes, “Ar of Moab was laid waste and brought to silence—Kir of Moab was laid waste and brought to silence.” “On the tops of their houses, and in their streets, every one shall howl weeping abundantly. And Heshbon shall cry, and Elealeh; their voice shall be heard even unto Jahaz, . . . in the way of Horonaim they shall raise up a cry of destruction.” Such, above all, was the cry, unparalleled in its fearfulness, which arose from the hapless millions of doomed Jerusalem—the dirge of woe which was heard amid the lurid blaze of their temple and city;—an utterance of despair so loud and terrible, that, in the words of the historian, the very mountains around gave back the echo. Such is the cry which is still, ever and anon, heard from wounded, tortured, terror-stricken nations, when the sword leaps from its scabbard at the bidding of wanton ambition, and plunges whole kingdoms into mourning: or when oppression lifts its cruel rod, and the

old, old story is told of the strong trampling on the weak; wringing a mournful wail from the down-trodden and enslaved. In our great Indian Empire, it seems but yesterday, since a similar shriek of bereft widows and desolate orphans ascended to heaven. The martial drum has again been heard. The dogs of war have been again let loose, and a louder moaning than all has just ascended from ensanguined battle-fields, and that, too, in the midst of the fairest provinces of God's earth, desecrating the name alike of Christianity and civilisation—"enough to make devils triumph and angels weep." Alas! that cry will be echoed and perpetuated so long as the Prince of darkness holds sway over the pride and passions of fallen humanity. Blessed be God, in Heaven, that "cry," in whatever sense we take it, shall never be heard.—"There shall be no more *Crying.*" One of the songs of the ransomed citizens of the New Jerusalem, as they call to their now discomfited oppressors, will be, "O thou enemy, destructions are come to a perpetual end; thou hast destroyed cities; their memorial is perished with them." We read in ver. 24, "And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it." Whatever was great and glorious and honourable among these earthly kings and sovereigns will be brought into the new City and kingdom of the redeemed. But no crown shall be there stained with ambition—no sceptre dimmed with the lust of conquest—no spirit debased with the cannibal-thirst of war. No, the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day, for peace shall be within its

walls and prosperity within its palaces. How joyful to forecast the glories of that celestial city where “there shall be no more *Crying!*”—to anticipate that happy era of which poetry, alike inspired and uninspired, has delighted to sing, when—

“Down the dark future, through long generations
 The echoing sounds grow fainter and then cease;
 And like a bell with solemn sweet vibrations,
 I hear once more the voice of Christ say ‘Peace !’

‘Peace !’ and no longer from its brazen portals
 The blast of war’s great organ shakes the skies,
 But beautiful as songs of the immortals,
 The holy melodies of love arise! ”

IV. Neither shall there be any more *Pain*. Descend we yet once more to the supposed picture-gallery of Earth. It is this time, again, a quiet, secluded corridor in these halls of sadness. We leave the loud din and cry of multitudes; and our thoughts are centred on the picture of one lone object. For long years, that wasted invalid has been prostrated on a couch of distress, uttering day by day the weary plaint, “Would God it were evening; would God it were morning;”—suffering ploughing its deep furrows on the cheek—every nerve a chord of anguish;—gnawing pain fastening, vulture-like, on every bone and sinew; the very footfall of loving friendship forbidden to cross the hushed chamber, lest it may awake sensations of torture.

Or, is there not *moral* pain as well as physical suffering? Yes; there are painful *duties*, painful *associations*, painful *meetings*, painful *partings*, painful *separations*. There

is the pain of breaking up and severing tried and valued and trusted friendships. There is the pain (what parent has not felt it when it comes?) of the first break in the family. There is the pain of having oceans and continents intervening between those whom the ties of nature or the accidents of life have taught us to love. There is the pain which Paul's Ephesian friends had, when they accompanied him to the ship at the Port of Miletus, and in solemn prayer the parting blessing of Heaven was asked and given. There is the worse moral pain of unhappy estrangement between Christian and Christian: those who are conscious of loving the one Lord, yet passing and repassing on the street without one sign of acknowledgment and recognition; alienated by some miserable party distinction or some still more unworthy private misunderstanding, which in their better moments and better natures they deplore with tears. But in Heaven there shall be no more *pain* of any kind: and the key to all the blessedness of this deathless, sorrowless, painless place is, that it is to be a Holy city;—“I John saw that *Holy city*.” Hushed will be the cry of anguish, because ended for ever will be the reign of sin.

And now, having explored these four picture-galleries of Earth, to illustrate by contrast the fourfold negative bliss of Heaven;—let us bear in mind, in conclusion, to whom it is we owe all the joys, positive and negative, of this celestial city: who is it that has plucked that sting from death; that has hushed, and will at last for ever hush, that voice of wailing and crying and pain? We

must revert to the magnificent opening vision of the Book—to the august Being who was seen walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks, and hear His voice:—“Fear not; I am He that liveth and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore; and have the keys of the grave and of death.” Enter by faith the Redeemer’s vacant tomb. See the vestments in which He had been wrapped. These are lying scattered on the rocky floor, the blessed vouchers and évidences, that in behalf of all His covenant people He has burst the bands of death. But behold, too, a further significant symbol. The *napkin* is folded up. It is carefully laid by. It is of use no more. The time of tears is over. The weeping world has had its anguish hushed by that risen Conqueror. Its sorrow, its crying, its pain—oh! for a little longer these may, and will continue. But the fear of *eternal* anguish, *eternal* weeping, *eternal* crying, is now past; and so brief is our weeping time during earth’s passing night, so nigh is the tearless hour, that the napkin may well be folded up—“wrapped together in a place by itself.” Gaze upon it reposing in the tomb of Jesus as the pledge of a tearless immortality. Blessed Saviour! Thou who didst shed for me, not Thy tears, but Thy blood, open these gates of righteousness in the celestial city, then shall I enter into them, and praise the Lord. It is Thy sovereign grace and bleeding love which will bring me there. This shall be my ascription now, in sight of these jewelled gates and jasper walls, and my ascription, when admitted as a glorified inhabitant, “Blessed be the Lord, who hath showed me His marvellous kindness in a strong City!”

XXIV.

The River of the Water of Life.

"AND HE SHOWED ME A PURE RIVER OF WATER OF LIFE, CLEAR AS CRYSTAL, PROCEEDING OUT OF THE THRONE OF GOD AND OF THE LAMB. IN THE MIDST OF THE STREET OF IT, AND ON EITHER SIDE OF THE RIVER, WAS THERE THE TREE OF LIFE, WHICH BARE TWELVE MANNER OF FRUITS, AND YIELDED HER FRUIT EVERY MONTH: AND THE LEAVES OF THE TREE WERE FOR THE HEALING OF NATIONS. AND THERE SHALL BE NO MORE CURSE: BUT THE THRONE OF GOD AND OF THE LAMB SHALL BE IN IT; AND HIS SERVANTS SHALL SERVE HIM."—REV. XXII. 1-3.

THE RIVER OF THE WATER OF LIFE.

IN the previous chapter, we had the sublime description of Heaven as a City, the palatial residence of the glorified Bride of Christ,—a city without temple, without light of sun or moon, or material luminary, yet resplendent with eternal radiance. Here we have conjoined to it a restored Paradise, with its crystal river and perennial Tree of Life. Earth's two holiest spots, Eden and Jerusalem, are thus employed in blended symbol, further to image forth a bliss which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived. The verses form a befitting climax to the series of preceding visions. How often have they been listened to by the dying believer, cheering him in his passage through Jordan, tuning his voice to his closing earthly song, until its notes mingle with those of the Seraphim!

Let us seek to gather from them a few additional thoughts, under new emblems, of the nature of the coming Heavenly bliss,—a few additional glimpses of the Everlasting Home. The reader must bear so far with repetition ; although under varying imagery, some of the same characteristics recur with which we are already acquainted. The inspired Painter loves to delineate over and over again the same subject, only rendering it under new aspects.

The first thought here regarding the happiness in reserve for the saints of God in their future Heaven is, that *it is a divinely-originated happiness*. John sees this River of the Water of Life “proceeding out of the Throne of God;” it has its fountain-head there. Could the simile possibly have been suggested by the only river-source with which he was familiar in Palestine, and which had to him the holiest of memories; that which no traveller who has seen it can ever forget,—the welling up of the Jordan in the cavern at the base of giant Mount Hermon (Jebel-esh-Sheikh, ‘the kingly mountain’), itself the most glorious emblem in that land of sacred symbol of the Throne “Eternal in the Heavens?” Proceeding from the footstool of this mountain-throne, Jordan, from the gush of its pure stream, might well suggest the words, “the river of the water of *life*.”

This, too, is the first feature in the vision which arrests the attention of the apostle; for, although the scenery on either side of the river occupied the foreground of the picture (nearer his point of vision,) yet, before entering on its description, he follows the Stream to its source. He sees it rising up from the foot of the Throne of God! And this will form one of the great elements of joy to the ransomed saints above, tracing all their wealth of bliss and glory to its origin in the free sovereign grace and love of Jehovah. But for *Him*, there could have been no river, no harp, no crown, no song. By the grace of God they are what they are. Moreover not only does the vision tell that God is the author and source of all happiness in heaven, but that He Himself constitutes

heaven's happiness. It is an emanation from Him:—its beams radiate from the great central Sun. Let the proclamation be sounded in the upper Sanctuary 'There is no God,'—the joys of Heaven would terminate. Annihilate that august Throne, and the river would cease to flow; the blessedness of angels, Redeemed and unredeemed, would be at an end. There may be, and there doubtless will be, other joys; but God Himself will be to His Ransomed their "exceeding joy." Jerusalem of old had no river. No Tigris, or Euphrates, or Tiber washed her walls, or flowed through her environing valleys. The Jordan was at a distance, and the Kedron was a winter torrent, which left a dry channel all summer long. But she had a nobler equivalent and compensation:—"The glorious LORD will be to her in the place of broad rivers and streams" (Isa. xxxiii. 21). This, in a loftier sense, will be true of the Heavenly Jerusalem: "God is in the midst of her" (Ps. xlvi. 5). The song of earth will be the song of eternity,—"all my springs are in Thee:—"—"with Thee is the fountain of life!"

A second element in the Heavenly bliss of the redeemed, spoken of in these words, is—That *it is a happiness derived from, and dependent upon, the atoning work of Christ.* The river proceeds from "the Throne of God and of the Lamb." And it is again added, in verse 3, "But the Throne of God and of THE LAMB shall be in it." 'The Lamb' denotes in this Book, as we now well know, the sacrificial name of Jesus. While we are reminded by "the Throne of God" of the purposes of love

in the adorable Trinity from all eternity, we are specially reminded that every portion of the river which makes glad the city of God has laved the foot of the cross; that the Redeemed will delight, as they crowd by the banks of the River of Life watching its outflowing, to trace up all their covenant privileges to the Saviour who died for them, and make this their eternal ascription, "*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, for Thou hast redeemed us unto God by Thy blood!*" They will see every gem of their crown resplendent with His atoning work and righteousness. They will understand then the full meaning of that expression in Eph. i. 14, where Heaven is spoken of as "*the purchased possession.*" Each gate of this 'City of the Crystal sea' will bear the inscription, "*Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price.*" Nay, more, it recalls one of the truths of a former vision, which we need not again expand,—the perpetuity of the exalted humanity of the Saviour. Though His *throne* is spoken of here, denoting His Deity and kingly Sovereignty, it is the Throne of THE LAMB. He will still be known in the midst of His redeemed Church as the sacrificial victim of Calvary,—not only the Brother in our nature, but as "*Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.*"

The next thought these words bring before us, is also one with which previous visions have made us familiar, that *the heavenly happiness will be pure in its nature.* It will be the happiness of *holiness.*

If we take the River as symbolic of the believer's bliss,

its *purity* specially arrested the attention of the Apostle. "He showed me a *pure* river of the Water of life ;" and in ver. 3, it is said, "there shall be no more Curse." The greatest curse of all is the curse of *sin*. That curse will be at an end ; and the Redeemed will know, in all its beauty and fulness, the truth of the beatitude—"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

How present happiness and peace are marred and polluted by impurity ! the breath of sin blurs the windows of the soul ; the curse of sin blights the fairest flowers in the earthly garden. The corruption of the heart, like the wind on the surface of the lake, disturbs its loveliest reflections ; and every stream that flows from it is ruffled and troubled too. Many a man, with all the world can give to make him happy—riches, honours, fame—is wretched, because of the venom of some serpent-sin, which he has nurtured and fondled, to the destruction of his own peace ! The moral *virus* has tainted his whole life and being : he has become the slave of his lust and is therefore miserable. Look at the world around us—what a scene of fretfulness and disquiet ! How unlike the divine picturing of the Seer of Patmos ! Mark its 'plottings and counter-plottings'—its envyings and slanders—its frauds and ambitions—its feuds and hatreds—and intense love of self. By that pure River of Life there will be no such disturbing causes—"no curse" (or "accursed thing") ; but one vast community of holy beings pervaded by one law—the law of love. We shall be happy, because holy ; heaven will be found to consist in assimilation to the divine character *in* its holiness—

the blending of the human with the divine will. “It doth not yet appear what we shall be” (there is much regarding the circumstantial of heavenly bliss which remains unrevealed); “but (*this*) we know, that when He shall appear we shall be *like* Him.” “And,” adds the Apostle, “let every man that hath this hope in him, purify himself even as He is pure.” Think once more of this oft reiterated qualification of heavenly citizenship. It is “*a pure river of the water of life*” on whose banks the Redeemed are to recline, and of whose streams they are to drink. “Without holiness no man can see the Lord.”

A fourth element of future Heavenly joy suggested in these words is, that there shall then be *a full disclosure and revelation of all that is mysterious in earthly dispensations*. What often makes the river of earth dark and turbid, is the mystery of the Divine dealings. We watch that river in its flow, or gaze down into its channel, but all is muddy, baffling, perplexing: “Thy judgments are a great deep.” But John, as he gazes, sees not only a pure river, but it is translucent: it is “*clear as crystal*.” In God’s own light he sees light: all will be revealed *then*. Every ‘why’ and ‘wherefore’ will be resolved: every “needs be” will be interpreted and explained. As we stoop over the crystalline depths, the ascription often before uttered through tears, will be then made with jubilant voice,—“Righteous art thou, O Lord;”—“We have known” (and *now believe*) “the love of God to us!”

A fifth characteristic of future Heavenly happiness here suggested is its *diversity*. The figure of the River is now changed to that of a tree. Ver. 2. "In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the Tree of Life." That tree, it is said, "bare twelve manner of fruits." And unlike the fruit-bearers of earth, which had only their annual crop and no more, it is fruit-yielding each successive month of the eternal year: it has its twelve fruit harvests. That Tree is Christ. We read of the Tree of life in Eden lost: here we read of it again in Paradise regained. No flaming sword now guards the way. It stands in the open street, free to every glorified citizen—the pledge and guarantee of his immortal joy. In Jesus, this ever-living Tree, there is found every kind of exalted happiness; bliss suited to the varied tastes and capacities and spiritual longings of His ransomed people. All are pictured as being congregated under its majestic shadow, culling the food they most desire; and no sooner is one crop gathered—than lo! the branches are anew laden and the baskets anew filled. "There is a river, the STREAMS (the manifold streams) whereof make glad the city of God." How different from earth! There, often when one stream is dried, all is dried. One fell misfortune comes, and the heart pines and withers, and nothing else can fill up its aching voids; one gourd is smitten, and nothing can reanimate its drooping, withered leaves. Even those on earth whose worldly cup has been fullest, who know best what joy is,—how short-lived, how unsatisfactory, after all! How it palls on the jaded appetite, if it have no higher and nobler element in it! But in

Heaven the blessedness is ever new. Its characteristics are—abundance, variety, perpetuity. “Ye are complete in Him.” The Tree, the River, the Leaves, seen beautifully to harmonise with the successive emblems, which, in a preceding vision, describe the happiness of the glorified. Is it the Tree and its abundant fruits? “They shall *hunger* no more.” Is it the River of living water?—“They shall *thirst* no more.” Is it the shadowy over-canopying Leaves with their healing influences?—“Neither shall the sun *light upon them, nor any heat.*” The believer’s bliss being a covenant one, and divine in its origin (flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb), is changeless and inexhaustible. No darkness can cloud it—no rock of human vicissitude can arrest its current. It flows on, and on, for ever, “to the ages of the ages!”

Once more. The words indicate another constituent element in the happiness of Heaven (which has also been anticipated in a previous vision), viz., *the activities of a glorified life*, ver. 3, last clause, “and *His servants shall serve Him.*” Heaven is not to be a blank existence. Even on earth there is a blessing in the law of labour—a blessing wrapt up in the very curse, “In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread.” The most wretched of lives is a life of constrained idleness: the most joyous is a life of active usefulness—the apostolic combination of diligence in business with fervency in spirit. And the same law will hold good in Heaven. It will be no dreamy, sentimental, Mahomedan Paradise. The Redeemed will

be engaged *serving* God in active ministries of holy love. "They rest," and yet "they rest not." They *rest* in the perfect peace of God, the realised possession of His favour. But they *rest not*, in the labour of a faithful service. Their highest happiness is in doing His pleasure. They "*serve* Him day and night in His temple."

What a pleasure on earth, a faithful servant experiences in doing the work of his master well! Even when such fidelity may be little deserved, or such labour poorly requited, it is rendered cheerfully from a sense of duty. What infinitely higher and purer joy will those Redeemed Saints in Heaven have, in serving ONE all worthy of their love, and who has infinite and surpassing claims on their regard! Then, at least, shall they serve Him with a devotion that never flags, a constancy that never falters, a singleness of eye and aim which admits of no deflection or deviation, a zeal which knows no decay. Duty will be transformed into delight, God's service will be its own noblest recompense. The cry of the old champion, as he first girded on his armour, will be the joy of eternity, "Lord! what wilt thou have me to do?"

How are we affected by these renewed glorious picturings of a future Heaven? Is it to us a pleasing prospect, that all the evils once brought in by Sin are to be removed—that the unstrung tuneless harp is to have its old harmonies revived—that our lost Eden is to be more than restored, for it is to be restored without the possibility of failure or fall. We have been again

specially reminded of Heaven's main moral characteristic. If this passage had described nothing but material beauty—the River, the Tree, the luscious Fruits, the Golden-paved streets, these would all (in themselves) fail to satisfy the aspirations of the Redeemed Soul. But “I shall be satisfied when I awake in *Thy likeness.*” “Blessed are they that *do His commandments*, that they may have right to the Tree of life, and enter in through the gates into the City.”

Nor are these spiritual blessings (symbolised by the Tree and its abundant fruitage) blessings only in reversion. They are ours now. We are invited *now* to partake of these fruits, and to repose under that shelter. “Christ who *is* our Life” (Col. iii. 4). *Life* is now alone found in Him; out of Him is death—the curse. Like the emblem of this Heavenly vision too, He is accessible at all times. The Tree bears fruit every month. Every month of life's momentous year we may come to Him. Youth may come to Him in spring: Manhood may come to Him in summer: even Old age may take shelter under these glorious branches. When other trees of existence are bared and stripped by winter blasts, *He* is filled with leaves, a refuge from the storm and a covert from the tempest. In the bright months of prosperity, in the dreary months of adversity; in months of sickness when laid on the lone pillow; in the dark months of bereavement,—this Tree is stretching forth its sheltering arms of mercy, that every weary, wandering bird may be screened from the gathering tempest. God grant we may experience in part now, and in their glo-

rious reality for evermore, the fulfilment of the Psalmist's exulting words, " He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty ! "

XXV.

Closing Chimes.

“BEHOLD, I COME QUICKLY. . . . HE THAT IS UNJUST, LET HIM BE UNJUST STILL: AND HE WHICH IS FILTHY, LET HIM BE FILTHY STILL: AND HE THAT IS RIGHTEOUS, LET HIM BE RIGHTEOUS STILL: AND HE THAT IS HOLY, LET HIM BE HOLY STILL. . . . AND, BEHOLD, I COME QUICKLY; AND MY REWARD IS WITH ME, TO GIVE EVERY MAN ACCORDING AS HIS WORK SHALL BE. . . . AND THE SPIRIT AND THE BRIDE SAY, COME. AND LET HIM THAT HEARETH SAY, COME. . . . HE WHICH TESTIFIETH THESE THINGS SAITH, SURELY I COME QUICKLY. AMEN. EVEN SO, COME, LORD JESUS.”—REV. XXII. 7, 11, 12, 17, 20.

CLOSING CHIMES.

WE have now arrived at the close of our meditations on this deeply interesting, though mysterious and difficult portion of the Word of God. In accordance with what was stated at the outset, whatever is ambiguous and conjectural, has, as much as possible been avoided, and from the golden treasure-house selection has been made only of those passages which are most practical, solemnising, edifying, comforting. It has been called by a writer who has grasped well its spiritual meaning and significance, “A Manual of consolation to the Church in her pilgrimage through this world to the Heavenly Canaan of her rest. It cheers with the consolatory assurance, that Christ is mightier than His enemies; that they who die for Him, live; that they who suffer for Him, reign; that the course of the Church upon earth is like the course of Christ Himself; that she is here a Witness of the Truth; that her office is to teach the world; that she will be fed by the Divine Hand, like the ancient Church, with manna in the wilderness; that she will be borne on eagles’ wings in her missionary career; and yet, that she must expect to suffer injuries from enemies and from friends; that she, too, must look to have her Gethsemane and her Calvary, but that she will also have her Olivet; that through the pains of agony and suffering,

and through the darkness of the grave, she will rise to the glories of a triumphant ascension, and to the everlasting joys of the New Jerusalem ; that she who has been for a time 'the Woman wandering in the Wilderness,' will be, for ever and ever, the Bride glorified in heaven." *

The great topic of *the Second Coming of Christ*, with which we are now so familiar, again challenges our consideration, standing out, as it does, more prominently in this concluding chapter than in any of the antecedent portions of the Apocalypse. We may appropriately liken these reiterated closing references to the ringing of the chimes with quickening peal, as the worshippers are gathering to take their places in the Heavenly Temple. Again, and again, and again, and yet again (four times in this one chapter), do these bells sound in the ears of a waiting expectant Church. *First*, In verse 7—"Behold, I *come quickly*." *Second*, In verse 12—"Behold, I *come quickly*, and my reward is with me." *Third*, In verse 17—where 'The Coming One' had beautifully announced Himself as "The Bright and Morning Star;" the response—the longing-prayer—rises in blended harmony from the Church on earth and the Church in Heaven ;—"And the Spirit and the Bride say, *Come*." Once more, in verse 20, the last audible voice of the Great Redeemer until that voice be heard on the Throne —gives too the assurance of His speedy *coming*. We close the Divine record with this "blessed hope," like a rainbow of promise spanning the sky of the future :—

* Bishop Wordsworth's "Introduction to the Book of Revelation."

“He which testifieth these things saith, SURELY I COME QUICKLY.”

“Surely *I come*,” and “*I come quickly*.” Has the Lord been slack concerning His promise? The hands of the clock of Time have moved slowly on, generation after generation since these declarations were uttered, and the Advent-hour has never yet struck. There is still no sign of the “*Parousia*”—no sound of the Saviour’s footfall. We strain our eyes from the window of prophecy; and though, at times, prognosticators and solvers of chronological numbers would persuade us that they see the heralds of His approach—the indications of the Morning Star; new events transpire to demolish their theories,—the world goes on as before, and ‘the glorious appearing’ is as far from us apparently as ever. Like the mother of Sisera looking through the lattice, the cry of deferred hope still is, “Why is His chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of His chariot?”

“The Church has waited long,
Her absent Lord to see,
And still in loneliness she waits,
A friendless stranger she.

“Age after age has gone,
Sun after sun has set,
And still in weeds of widowhood
She weeps, a mourner yet.”

How is this? How are we to reconcile the repeated assertions of a Saviour who is faithful in all His promises, with the fact that eighteen centuries have travelled onward in succession, and yet the great culminating promise of a speedy coming has not been fulfilled?

In reply, we may begin by giving the words of another Apostle—“*Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*” (2 Pet. iii. 8). Space and time are two relative terms. Is it space?—a yard, even a mile, is a brief distance to us; it is a laborious pilgrimage to the tiny insect. To traverse a hemisphere would be for us a vast journey; it would be but a pausing place in the angel’s flight. A planetary system would appear a wide expanse to the angel; it would be but a speck in the eye of God,—one of the milestones of immensity, so to speak, in the journeyings of Omnipotence! So also with regard to Time.* Periods of time which seem great to some, may seem small to others. Look at the ephemera (to take the apt illustration of a writer on this subject), with their apparently fugitive moments of conscious being. They were called into existence after the morning sun had risen, and before he sets again, they have perished. The same day witnesses their birth and their death. *Their* lifetime to us, is like the briefest of one day out of our threescore and ten years. All things are thus long or short, great or small, according to the standard by which we judge them. Hills that appear high to the peasant born in the plains, are nothing to the shepherd of the Alps and Apennines. The inland lake which appears large to the child who has never been beyond the mountains which inclose it, is nothing to the sailor who is familiar with the wide ocean. The swiftness of the

* See a thoughtful and suggestive sermon on this subject by the Rev. C. Bradley, late of Clapham, small series, 1837, p. 75.

railway train or of the cannon ball is great ; but what is it to the man of science, who can compute the velocity of light—those golden arrows shot from the sun at the rate of 192,000 miles in a second ?

We may apply this to the saying of Christ in these verses. The period elapsing between His first and second Coming is great to us, but nothing to Him. To us, during these indefinite ages, generations have already come and gone : revolutions of empires have taken place : kingdoms have risen and fallen, and new dynasties have sprung from their ashes. But what is that to the everlasting God, with whom a thousand years are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night ? *Our* standard to measure periods and events is ‘Time’—*His* is ‘Eternity.’—ETERNITY :—it is the lifetime—the biography of the Almighty—each epoch and era a page in the vast volume ! If we compute from the birth of creation, when the first pillar of the earth was laid, to the period when the angel shall proclaim ‘time to be no more,’ it may appear a long lapse of ages—eras on eras—millenniums on millenniums ; yet in *His* sight, compared with Eternity, what is it all ? as the beat of a pulse, or the swing of a pendulum.

When, therefore, we may be inclined to wonder at the apparent non-fulfilment of Christ’s assertion, let us remember *who* says it ? It is He to whom past, present, future, are alike the same. What to Him is that span of years, be what it may, which bridges the period between His first and second coming ? It is as nothing. As He is leaving with His servant and Evangelist His

last inspired utterance, and the clouds which screen Him from mortal vision are once more gathering around Him, He exclaims, taking all time in at a glance, "*Surely I come quickly!*"

Again, it is worthy of remark, that in the apparent delay of the second Coming, God is only acting in conformity with His own uniform procedure and with the principles of His government, alike in nature and providence. In accordance with the analogy of nature, the Divine purposes are slowly matured. The full light of day is not ushered in all at once. There is first the glimmering dawn, then sunrise; gradually the fiery chariot is driven up the steeps of heaven. The development of vegetation follows the same progressive law, from the incipient bud of early spring, through the green leaves and blossoms of summer, to the golden glories and ripe fruits of autumn. Our world might have been created by a word: the fiat of the Almighty might have formed and finished it in the twinkling of an eye: but He purposely took six periods of time to elaborate His own handiwork ere pronouncing it very good. In the physical and mental development of man—the High Priest of this creation—we have to note the same thing: he reaches his natural stature and his intellectual maturity, not at once—but after the lapse of many years. And so it is in greater things. There is a plan in all God's dealings and providential arrangements. There was a preparation of our thousand years before the first advent of Christ.

He, the promised Seed of the woman, might have come at once—in the very hour of the Fall. He might have come (as Eve expected Him) when she hailed her first-born child with the words “I have gotten a man—*the Lord!*” That Lord might have glorified Eden with His presence, and restored its blighted, withered bowers. But such was not God’s way. A long ritual of blood and sacrifice had to intervene. Prophecy upon prophecy had to be uttered and fulfilled. Many an old pious Hebrew “*looked*” anxiously; but, like Simeon and Anna, they had to “*wait*” for the Consolation of Israel. There was an era set apart and appointed, called “the fulness of time,” when the Incarnation would take place, and no sooner. Christ seems to have anticipated with holy ardour that appointed period. When it arrived He came “*quickly*.” “Lo I come!” were His words,—“I delight to do Thy will, O my God.” Moreover, even after His advent to the manger of Bethlehem, many years elapsed before the great Offering took place. He would not—could not anticipate. He would not leave Galilee for Judea until “the hour had come.” But no sooner had the appointed season elapsed, than His reserve and reluctance are set aside: then He waited not a moment:—again He came “*quickly*;” “*When the time was come that He should be received up*, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem:” “I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished.” So also is it with regard to His future Coming. Certain great transactions have to take place in the world; certain great events have to be evolved, ere the grand climax of His advent

in glory. He Himself tells us that His gospel must be “preached as a witness to all nations, and *then* shall the end come.” It is remarkable that even His apostles, though their language at times seems to indicate that they expected the Advent in their own day—specially note some great antecedent occurrences, which leave the period not only indeterminate, but connect it with a distant future. Paul speaks of a great “apostasy” preceding it:—“That day shall not come unless there be the *apostasy* (or falling away) first, and that Man of Sin be revealed.” James exhorts to patient endurance and waiting; and gives the comparison of the husbandman having long patience for the maturity of his seed; as if he looked far onwards to the Great event which was to signalise the world’s harvest-home. Peter, while in one breath he speaks of the end of all things being at hand, and this as a motive to sobriety, watchfulness, and prayer, guards in the next, against the unwarrantable inference of a coming of Christ in the generation then living.* And what have we seen in this Book of Revelation, in which the same topic is so constantly introduced, but the record of a series of providential dispensations, which must *all* occur before Christ can take to Himself His great power and reign? These repeated statements in this chapter regarding the Second Advent, are inserted in the form of a postscript to the Book. Might they not be equivalent to the declaration, ‘When all these preceding visions are accomplished, when all these seals are broken, these vials exhausted; when the power of the false Prophet is

* See Sermons of Professor Archer Butler, 1st series, page 6.

crushed, and Romanism trodden underfoot, the great Dragon cast out, Apollyon the deceiver vanquished ; when the mission angel shall have sped his way amid the world's benighted millions ; when every nation shall have heard the joyful sound ; when the Jews, My own outcast people, shall have caught up the universal hymn, and mingled with the Gentile Hosanna their Hebrew 'Alleluia' ;—*then* (immediately after) *I shall come* QUICKLY : I am only waiting the signal that the mystery of God on earth is finished, and the gates and everlasting doors of Heaven which lifted up their heads that I might enter in, shall be once more opened, that I may come forth to pour my benediction on My redeemed Church.' Zecharias of old "tarried in the temple :" the people waited for him. It is so with our Great High Priest. He has said, "I come quickly." He seems to tarry. But there is work to do before the celestial veil can be withdrawn, and we can see Him as He is. "From henceforth," we read, (after His ascension), "He is waiting (or expecting) till His enemies be made His footstool." But whenever these preliminary conquests over His enemies are complete ; whenever the final intercessory prayer ascends, "Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am ;" then with joy ('quickly') will He appear, to utter the last and most gladsome of all His invitations, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

And, in addition to what has already been said, it may

be yet further added, that when Christ says, “Behold I come *quickly*,” and has not come, the delay may be to give the world space for repentance. This is one of the views which the apostle Peter emphatically sets forth:—“The Lord is *not* slack concerning His promise (of His second Coming), as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to usward, *not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*” There was a reprieve in the case of the dwellers on the old earth, ere the flood came and destroyed them all; and now, again, ere the deluge of fire sweep, He would give space—“He would command all men everywhere, to repent.” His not coming *quickly*, is a gracious token of His marvellous forbearance. He will give this prodigal world an opportunity, ere He close the gates of home and welcome, to arise and go to its Father. There is a merciful pause and parenthesis ere the final doom is uttered. Like that emphatic pause and ellipsis in the words of Micah, He says, “And because I will do this unto thee, ‘Prepare to meet thy God!’” The long-suffering of God *waited* in the days of Noah ere the reservoirs were unsealed. The long-suffering of God waited in the days of Abraham ere the bolts of fire leapt from the brimstone-cloud, and laid Sodom and Gomorrah in ashes; and His long-suffering and patience is now again manifested in this last dispensation, that sinners may yet embrace the call to repent and be saved, and that every living member of His living Church throughout the world may be gathered in.

But without dwelling on these and other possible reasons for the delay of the Coming, the word is sure, "He that shall come, will come and will not tarry." "SURELY I come quickly." In other things we may have varied experiences. Some may never know what sickness is. Some may never know what the loss of worldly substance is; what it is to confront chill penury, or to hear orphans crying for food which they have not to give. Some may never know what bereavement is; to have stripped houses, vacant chairs, and desolate and aching hearts. But "every eye shall see HIM!" "We *must* all appear before the Judgment-seat of Christ." The Second Advent is to the believer a glorious, to the wicked a terrible certainty. How strange that this august verity should exercise so little practical influence over us! Everything else in the world is uncertain. The ordinary business of life (trade—merchandise) is built on contingencies. The soldier goes forth to field and fame; but fever strikes him down before he plants his foot on the enemy's shores—ere he has opportunity to wreath his brow with laurel. The voyager goes forth on his ocean-highway, anticipating the fond welcome of friends in the distant harbour; but rocket and lifeboat and heroic effort all fail to save, when the fatal reef is struck. The merchant sends forth his vessel, borne along with propitious breezes, but when in sight of port it founders: or a mighty cyclone comes, as if the very spirits of the deep were stirred;—its moorings are snapped as tow—its timbers are tossed on the wild waves, and its owner is a ruined man. The farmer has his fields filled with

a golden harvest : in one night the rains have descended on the mountains,—down sweeps the torrent, and his waving crops are a mass of desolation. You can say “*Surely*,” of nothing here ; all is peradventure. But the Lord is “not a man that He should lie.” “He SHALL come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.” “*SURELY*,” He says, “I come quickly !”

Believer, be it yours to be living in the habitual anticipation of this day. The prospect put music of old into the lips of Patriarchs and Psalmists and Apostles and Prophets. “Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad . . . before the Lord ; for He cometh, for He cometh to judge the earth.” “The Lord, my God, shall come, and all the saints with Thee.” The Apostle Peter, like a watcher on cliff or tower, eager to catch the earliest beam of sunrise, speaks of “looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God.” We have already adverted to the remarkable contrast between the way the inspired writers speak of *Death* and of Christ’s *Second Coming*. Death ! it is ever described as an *enemy*—a terrible foe armed with a sting—a destroyer, a usurper. But the Second Coming of the Redeemer is the topic of joyous expectation. Believers are represented as servants, cheerfully working on during their Master’s absence ; but all alert for the sound of His footsteps, that “when He cometh and knocketh, they may be ready to open unto Him immediately.”

We know well, that this most glorious yet awful of truths has been contemned by the scoffer, and made the

subject of unholy derision. The challenge is presumptuously made, ‘Where is this speedy coming which is spoken of? It is a tale of superstitious terror—a lie for which you have no authority, save the ambiguous words of an antiquated Book.’ Because the Lord delayeth His coming; because nature maintains her unvarying sequences; because she has no sign of age or decay on her majestic brow; he cannot credit the startling belief that all these visible things shall one day be dissolved. So thought men, “filthy dreamers,” before the flood. They would not credit the tremendous catastrophe, until the waters were sweeping down their refuges of lies; and they found, when it was too late, that the door of the ark and of mercy was shut against them! May it not be so with us? There may be in our case, as with them, a time of *reprieve*—a merciful period of grace and forbearance,—when from the true Ark there is a voice heard saying, “Come unto Me and I will give you rest.” If the eye of one such unhappy scorner should fall on these pages, let him avail himself of this “the day of merciful visitation.” Forbid that when the deluge is heaving, the trumpet sounding, the world passing away, he should come to find, but find too late, that “neither is there salvation in any other;” to bewail wasted years, lost opportunities, misspent Sabbaths, niggard and selfish deeds, unrighteous and unjust practices, his work all undone when his time is done! For, let such observe, that there are monitory sounds which mingle in this closing chapter with other joyous advent chimes. Among these, none is more solemn than that verse which asserts

the permanence and perpetuation of moral character ;—that as men live, so do men die ; that present principles, habits, tastes, are shaping, moulding, consolidating, our eternal destinies. “ He that is unjust, let him be unjust still ; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still ; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still ; and he that is holy, let him be holy still. Behold, I come quickly : and,” it is added, “ My reward is with Me to give ” (or rather “ to give back ; ” so it is rendered in a literal version) “ each one as his work is.” “ To give back ! ” solemn, truthful, equitable definition of a limitless future of bliss or of woe ! It is a ‘giving back’ to each one of the present ;—a paying back of contracted debt, whether of good or of evil—a reaping corresponding to the sowing—the awards of eternity scrupulously regulated by the transactions of time.

Is it not a comfort, also, to those who may be mourning their “ loved and lost ; ” that while the unjust will be unjust still, and the filthy will be filthy still ; the holy will be holy still, the meek and gentle will be the meek and gentle still ; those known for lowly and unostentatious deeds of love, will continue these ministries of holy activity through eternity. Ay ! the flower we think nipped in the bud, will unfold and expand there the blossoms of earth, shedding unfading fragrance, and decked with unfading beauty.

God grant we may not be in darkness that that day should overtake us as a thief ! Rather, as we now listen to the latest voice of the Great ‘ Testifier,’ the last toll of the advent-bell, the last ‘ Memory of Patmos,’ let it sound

to us like strains of seraphic music floating on a midnight sea. Let it ring in our ears blended comfort and warning ; tempering prosperity, mitigating adversity, moderating the world's ambitions, stimulating to holiness, preparing for heaven. Whatever may be the antecedent or intervening events to which we have alluded, let the Second Coming itself tower above them all, in the glorious distance, like some colossal Alp, with plain and valley and lowlier mountain between, but rising peerless in the blue horizon, its gleaming top golden with heavenly sunlight, and from its eternal snows and hidden fountains sending forth ten thousand streams of hope and joy, to refresh the dwellers in the Valley of tears. Bright and Morning Star ! Harbinger of eternal day ! who will not bid Thee welcome? who will not help, in the noblest sense, to—

“ Ring in the Christ that is to be !”

“ The Spirit says COME ! ” The Divine Agent, whose own “ coming,” as the Paraclete or Comforter, was declared by the departing Saviour to more than indemnify the Church for her Redeemer's absence, hails the advent which is to crown and consummate His own work as the Glorifier of Christ. “ The Bride says COME ! ” the ransomed Church on earth, longing for the bridal day of perfected bliss,—the ransomed Church in heaven, saints, martyrs, departed friends who have fallen asleep in Jesus—take up the antiphonal strain, and cry COME ! A groaning creation, weary of the bondage of sin and sorrow, and longing to go forth from its leper-couch walking and leaping and praising God,

cries COME! Can *we* take up one of the multiplying echoes, and, blending our prayer with the sons of God, give willing response to the Apostle's closing invocation, "And let him that heareth say COME?" In lowly rejoicing confidence, can we include ourselves in the sublime words of another faithful 'Watcher' for this glorious Day-spring :—"*For the Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord!*" "AMEN! EVEN SO, COME, LORD JESUS!"

Christ is coming ! let creation
From her groans and travail cease ;
Let the glorious proclamation
Hope restore and faith increase ;
Christ is coming !
Come, Thou blessed Prince of Peace.

Earth can now but tell the story
Of Thy bitter cross and pain ;
She shall yet behold Thy glory,
When Thou comest back to reign :
Christ is coming !
Let each heart repeat the strain.

Long Thine exiles have been pining,
Far from rest, and home, and Thee ;
Soon, in heavenly vestures shining,
Their Restorer they shall see :
Christ is coming !
Haste the joyous jubilee.

With that 'blessed hope' before us,
Let no harp remain unstrung ;
Let the mighty advent-chorus
Onward roll in every tongue :
Christ is coming !
COME, LORD JESUS, QUICKLY COME !

“BEHOLD ! I COME QUICKLY !

BLESSED IS HE THAT KEEPETH THE SAYINGS OF THE
PROPHECY OF THIS BOOK.”—Rev. xxii. 7.



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